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AN  
A P O L O G Y  
FOR  
C H R I S T I A N I T Y,  
IN  
A S E R I E S O F L E T T E R S,  
ADDRESSED TO  
E D W A R D G I B B O N, Esq;  
AUTHOR OF THE  
D E C L I N E and F A L L of the R O M A N E M P I R E.



THE  
APOLOGY  
OF  
CHRISTIANITY



A SERMON

EDWARD GIBSON, M.D.

AUTHOR OF THE

DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

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DECLINE and FALL of the ROMAN EMPIRE.

By R. W A T S O N, D.D. F.R.S.  
AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

*We have not followed cunningly devised fables. 2 Pet. i. 16.*

A L S O,  
R E M A R K S  
ON THE  
TWO LAST CHAPTERS  
O F  
M R. G I B B O N ' S H I S T O R Y,  
O F T H E  
DECLINE and FALL of the ROMAN EMPIRE.

I N A  
L E T T E R T O A F R I E N D.

—Cumque talis prodisset, ut præstigiis quibusdam admirandis facile posset imponere lectori vel imperito, vel simplici, vel parum attento, non fuit consilium prorsus obticescere; præsertim cum sint, quibus nihil non ardeat, quod diversam factionem adjuvet.

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M D C C L X X V I I .

APOLLO  
FOR  
CHRISTIANITY

SERIES OF LETTERS  
ADDRESS TO  
EDWARD GIBBON, ESQ.  
OF THE  
LONDON AND FALMOUTH ROMAN EMERALD  
BY R. W. WATSON, D.D., F.R.S.  
AND HIS EXCELLENCY OF AUSTRIA IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
LONDON: J. B. L. 1810



R. E. K. S.  
TWO LAST CHAPTERS

MR. GIBBON'S HISTORY  
OF THE  
DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN A  
LETTER TO A FRIEND  
BY R. W. WATSON, D.D., F.R.S.  
LONDON: J. B. L. 1810

DUBLIN:  
W. WATSON, W. WATSON, W. WATSON  
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W. WATSON, W. WATSON, W. WATSON  
W. WATSON, W. WATSON, W. WATSON

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## LETTER FIRST.

SIR,

**I**T would give me much uneasiness to be reputed an enemy to free inquiry in religious matters, or as capable of being animated into any degree of personal malevolence against those who differ from me in opinion. On the contrary, I look upon the right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, as superior to the control of human authority; and have ever regarded free disquisition, as the best mean of illustrating the doctrine, and establishing the truth of Christianity. Let the followers of Mahomet, and the zealots of the church of Rome, support their several religious systems by damping every effort of the human intellect to pry into the foundations of their

B                      faith;



faith; but never can it become a Christian, to be afraid of being asked a *reason of the faith that is in him*; nor a Protestant, to be studious of enveloping his religion in mystery and ignorance; nor the church of England, to abandon that moderation, by which she permits every individual *et sentire quæ velit, et quæ sentiat dicere*.

It is not, Sir, without some reluctance, that, under the influence of these opinions, I have prevailed upon myself to address these letters to you; and you will attribute to the same motive, my not having given you this trouble sooner. I had moreover an expectation, that the task would have been undertaken by some person, capable of doing greater justice to the subject, and more worthy of your attention. Perceiving however, that the two last chapters, the fifteenth in particular, of your very laborious and classical history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, had made upon many an impression not at all advantageous to Christianity; and that the silence  
of

of others, of the Clergy especially, began to be looked upon as an acquiescence in what you had therein advanced; I have thought it my duty, with the utmost respect and good-will towards you, to take the liberty of suggesting to your consideration, a few remarks upon some of the passages, which have been esteemed, (whether you meant, that they should be so esteemed or not) as powerfully militating against that revelation, which still is to many, what it formerly was *to the Greeks, Foolishness*; but which we deem to be true, to be *the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*

To the inquiry, by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth, you rightly answer, By the evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of it's Author. But afterwards, in assigning for this astonishing event five secondary causes, derived from the passions of the human heart and the general circumstances

of mankind, you seem to some to have insinuated, that Christianity, like other Impostures, might have made it's way in the world, though it's origin had been as human as the means by which you suppose it was spread. It is no wish or intention of mine, to fasten the odium of this insinuation upon you; I shall simply endeavour to shew, that the causes you produce, are either inadequate to the attainment of the end proposed; or that their efficiency, great as you imagine it, was derived from other principles than those, you have thought proper to mention.

Your first cause is "the inflexible, and, "if you may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it "is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, "which instead of inviting, had deterred "the Gentiles from embracing the law of "Moses." — Yes, Sir, we are agreed, that the zeal of the Christians was inflexible, *neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers,*

*powers, nor things present, nor things to come, could bend it into a separation from the love of God, which was in Christ Jesus their Lord; it was an inflexible obstinacy, in not blaspheming the name of Christ, which every where exposed them to persecution; and which even your amiable and philosophic Pliny thought proper, for want of other crimes, to punish with death in the Christians of his province.—We are agreed too, that the zeal of the Christians was intolerant; for it denounced tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that did evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; it would not tolerate in Christian worship, those who supplicated the image of Cæsar, who bowed down at the altars of Paganism, who mixed with the votaries of Venus, or wallowed in the filth of Bacchanalian festivals.*

But though we are thus far agreed, with respect to the inflexibility and intolerance of Christian zeal; yet as to the principle from which it was derived, we are *toto cælo* di-



vided in opinion. You deduce it from the Jewish religion; I would refer it to a more adequate and a more obvious source, a full persuasion of the truth of Christianity. What! think you that it was a zeal derived from the unfociable spirit of Judaism, which which inspired Peter with courage to upbraid the whole people of the Jews in the very capital of Judea, with having *delivered up Jesus, with having denied him in the presence of Pilate, with having desired a murderer to be granted them in his stead, with having killed the Prince of life?* Was it from this principle, that the same Apostle in conjunction with John, when summoned, not before the dregs of the people, (whose judgments they might have been supposed capable of misleading, and whose resentment they might have despised,) but before the rulers and the elders and the scribes, the dread Tribunal of the Jewish nation, and commanded by them to teach no more in the name of Jesus; boldly answered, *that they could not but speak the things, which they had seen and heard? — they had seen with their eyes, they*  
*had*

*bad handled with their hands the words of life; and no human jurisdiction could deter them from being faithful witnesses of what they had seen and heard. Here then you may perceive the genuine and undoubted origin of that zeal, which you ascribe to what appears to me a very insufficient cause; and which the Jewish rulers were so far from considering as the ordinary effect of their religion, that they were exceedingly at a loss how to account for it;—now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled. The Apostles, heedless of consequences, and regardless of every thing but truth, openly everywhere professed themselves witnesses of the resurrection of Christ; and with a confidence, which could proceed from nothing but conviction, and which pricked the Jews to the heart, bade the house of Israel know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

I mean

I mean not to produce these instances of apostolic zeal, as direct proofs of the truth of Christianity; for every religion, nay, every absurd sect of every religion, has had it's zealots, who have not scrupled to maintain their principles at the expence of their lives; and we ought no more to infer the truth of Christianity from the mere zeal of its propagators, than the truth of Mahometanism from that of a Turk. When a man suffers himself to be covered with infamy, pillaged of his property, and dragged at last to the block or the stake, rather than give up his opinion; the proper inference is, not that his opinion is true, but that he believes it to be true; and a question of serious discussion immediately presents itself, — upon what foundation has he built his belief? This is often an intricate inquiry, including in it a vast compass of human learning; a Bramin or a Mandarin, who should observe a missionary attesting the truth of Christianity with his blood, would, notwithstanding, have a right to ask many questions, before it could be expected, that he should give an assent to  
our

our faith. In the case indeed of the Apostles, the inquiry would be much less perplexed ; since it would briefly resolve itself into this,—whether they were credible reporters of facts, which they themselves professed to have seen :—and it would be an easy matter to shew, that their zeal in attesting what they were certainly competent to judge of, could not proceed from any alluring prospect of worldly interest or ambition, or from any other probable motive than a love of truth.

But the credibility of the Apostles' testimony, or their competency to judge of the facts which they relate, is not now to be examined ; the question before us simply relates to the principle, by which their zeal was excited ; and it is a matter of real astonishment to me, that any one conversant with the history of the first propagation of Christianity, acquainted with the opposition it every where met with from the people of the Jews, and aware of the repugnancy which must ever subsist between it's tenets and



and those of Judaism, should ever think of deriving the zeal of the primitive Christians from the Jewish religion.

Both Jew and Christian, indeed, believed in one God, and abominated idolatry; but this detestation of idolatry, had it been unaccompanied with the belief of the resurrection of Christ, would probably have been just as inefficacious in exciting the zeal of the Christian to undertake the conversion of the Gentile world, as it had for ages been in exciting that of the Jew. But supposing, what I think you have not proved, and what I am certain cannot be admitted without proof, that a zeal derived from the Jewish religion inspired the first Christians with fortitude to oppose themselves to the institutions of Paganism; what was it, that encouraged them to attempt the conversion of their own countrymen? Amongst the Jews they met with no superstitious observances of idolatrous rites; and therefore amongst them, could have no opportunity,

portunity, of “ declaring and confirming their zealous opposition to Polytheism, or of fortifying by frequent protestations their attachment to the Christian faith.” Here then at least, the cause you have assigned for Christian zeal ceases to operate; and we must look out for some other principle than a zeal against idolatry, or we shall never be able satisfactorily to explain the ardour, with which the Apostles pressed the disciples of Moses, to become the disciples of Christ.

Again, does a determined opposition to, and an open abhorrence of, every the minutest part of an established religion, appear to you to be the most likely method of conciliating to another faith those who profess it? The Christians, you contend, could neither mix with the Heathens in their convivial entertainments, nor partake with them in the celebration of their solemn festivals; they could neither associate with them in their hymenæal, nor funeral rites; they could not cultivate their arts, or be spectators of their shews;

shews; in short, in order to escape the rites of Polytheism, they were, in your opinion, obliged to renounce the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of life. Now, how such an extravagant and intemperate zeal as you here describe, can, humanly speaking, be considered as one of the chief causes of the quick propagation of Christianity, in opposition to all the established powers of Paganism, is a circumstance I can by no means comprehend. The Jesuit missionaries, whose human prudence no one will question, were quite of a contrary way of thinking; and brought a deserved censure upon themselves, for not scrupling to propagate the faith of Christ, by indulging to their Pagan converts a frequent use of idolatrous ceremonies. Upon the whole it appears to me, that the Christians were in no wise indebted to the Jewish religion, for the zeal with which they propagated the gospel amongst Jews as well as Gentiles; and that such a zeal as you describe, let its principle be what you please, could never have been devised by any human understanding,

as

as a probable mean of promoting the progress of a reformation in religion ; much less could it have been thought of, or adopted by a few ignorant and unconnected men.

In expatiating upon this subject you have taken an opportunity of remarking, that “ the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua “ had beheld with careless indifference the “ most amazing miracles—and that in con- “ tradition to every known principle of the “ human mind, that singular people (the “ Jews) seems to have yielded a stronger and “ more ready assent to the traditions of their “ remote ancestors, than to the evidence of “ their own senses.” This observation bears hard upon the veracity of the Jewish scriptures ; and, was it true, would force us either to reject them, or to admit a position as extraordinary as a miracle itself ;—that the testimony of others produced in the human mind, a stronger degree of conviction concerning a matter of fact, than the testimony of the senses themselves.—It happens however, in the present case, that we are under



no necessity of either rejecting the Jewish scriptures, or of admitting such an absurd position; for the fact is not true, that the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua beheld with careless indifference, the miracles related in the Bible to have been performed in their favour. That these miracles were not sufficient to awe the Israelites into an uniform obedience to the Theocracy, cannot be denied; but, whatever reasons may be thought best adapted to account for the propensity of the Jews to idolatry, and their frequent defection from the worship of the one true God, a "stubborn incredulity" cannot be admitted as one of them.

To men, indeed, whose understandings have been enlightened by the Christian revelation, and enlarged by all the aids of human learning; who are under no temptations to idolatry from without, and whose reason from within, would revolt at the idea of worshipping the infinite Author of the universe under any created symbol;—to men who are compelled, by the utmost exertion  
of

of their reason, to admit as an irrefragable truth, what puzzles the first principles of all reasoning—the eternal existence of an uncaused Being;—and who are conscious, that they cannot give a full account of any one phænomenon in nature, from the rotation of the great orbs of the universe to the germination of a blade of grass, without having recourse to him, as the primary incomprehensible cause of it;—and who from seeing him every where, have, by a strange fatality, (converting an excess of evidence into a principle of disbelief) at times doubted concerning his existence any where, and made the very universe their God;—to men of such a stamp, it appears almost an incredible thing, that any human being which had seen the order of nature interrupted, or the uniformity of it's course suspended, though but for a moment, should ever afterwards lose the impression of reverential awe, which, they apprehend, would have been excited in their minds. But whatever effect the visible interposition of the Deity might have in removing

ing the scepticism, or confirming the faith of a few Philosophers, it is with me a very great doubt, whether the people in general of our days, would be more strongly affected by it, than they appear to have been in the days of Moses.

Was any people under heaven, to escape the certain destruction impending over them, from the close pursuit of an enraged and irresistible enemy, by seeing the waters of the Ocean *becoming a wall to them on their right hand and on their left*; they would, I apprehend, be agitated by the very same passions we are told the Israelites were, when they saw the sea returning to his strength, and swallowing up the host of Pharaoh; *they would fear the Lord, they would believe the Lord*, and they would express their faith and their fear by praising the Lord:—they would not behold such a great work with *careless indifference*, but with astonishment and terror; nor would you be able to detect the slightest vestige of *stubborn incredulity* in their song of gratitude. No length of time  
would

would be able to blot from their minds the memory of such a transaction, or induce a doubt concerning it's Author, though future hunger and thirst might make them call out for water and bread, with a desponding and rebellious importunity.

But it was not at the Red Sea only, that the Israelites regarded with something more than a *careless indifference* the amazing miracles which God had wrought; for when the law was declared to them from mount Sinai, *all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the tempest, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off, and they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*—This again, Sir, is the Scripture account of the language of the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua; and I leave it to you to consider, whether this is the language of *stubborn incredulity, and careless indifference.*

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We are told in Scripture too, that whilst any of the *contemporaries* of Moses and Joshua were alive, the whole people served the Lord; the impression, which a sight of the miracles had made, was never effaced; nor the obedience which might have been expected as a natural consequence, refused, till Moses and Joshua, and all their contemporaries, were gathered unto their fathers; till *another generation after them arose, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.*—But *the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that out-lived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel.*

I am far from thinking you, Sir, unacquainted with Scripture, or desirous of sinking the weight of it's testimony; but as the words of the history, from which you must have derived your observation, will not support you, in imputing *careless indifference* to the contemporaries of Moses, or *stubborn incredulity* to the forefathers of the Jews; I  
know

know not what can have induced you to pass so severe a censure upon them, except that you look upon a lapse into idolatry as a proof of infidelity. In answer to this, I would remark, that with equal soundness of argument we ought to infer, that every one who transgresses a religion, disbelieves it; and that every individual, who in any community incurs civil pains and penalties, is a disbeliever of the existence of the authority by which they are inflicted. The sanctions of the Mosaic law were, in your opinion, terminated within the narrow limits of this life; in that particular then, they must have resembled the sanctions of all other civil laws: *transgress and die* is the language of every one of them, as well as that of Moses; and I know not what reason we have to expect, that the Jews, who were animated by the same hopes of temporal rewards, impelled by the same fears of temporal punishments with the rest of mankind, should have been so singular in their conduct, as never to have listened to the clamours of passion before the still voice of reason; as never to have preferred a present gratification of sense, in

the lewd celebration of idolatrous rites, before the rigid observance of irksome ceremonies.

Before I release you from the trouble of this letter, I cannot help observing, that I could have wished you had furnished your reader with Limborch's answers to the objections of the Jew Orobio, concerning the perpetual obligation of the law of Moses; you have indeed mentioned Limborch with respect, in a short note; but though you have studiously put into the mouths of the Judaizing Christians in the Apostolic days, and with great strength inserted into your text, whatever has been said by Orobio, or others against Christianity, from the supposed perpetuity of the Mosaic dispensation; yet you have not favoured us with any one of the numerous replies, which have been made to these seemingly strong objections. You are pleased, it is true, to say, "that the industry of our learned divines  
"has abundantly explained the ambiguous  
"language of the old Testament, and the  
"ambiguous

“ambiguous conduct of the Apostolic teachers.” It requires, Sir, no learned industry, to explain what is so obvious and so express, that he who runs may read it: The language of the old Testament is this: *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.* This, methinks, is a clear and solemn declaration, there is no ambiguity at all in it, that the covenant with Moses was not to be perpetual, but was in some future time to give way to a *new covenant*. I will not detain you with an explanation of what Moses himself had said upon this subject; but you may try, if you please, whether you can apply the following declaration, which Moses made to the Jews, to any prophet or succession of prophets, with the same propriety that you can to Jesus Christ:—*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto*



*him shall ye hearken.* If you think this ambiguous or obscure, I answer, That it is not a history, but a prophecy; and as such unavoidably liable to some degree of obscurity, till interpreted by the event.

Nor was the conduct of the Apostles more ambiguous, than the language of the old Testament; they did not indeed at first comprehend the whole of the nature of the new dispensation; and when they did understand it better, they did not think proper upon every occasion to use their Christian liberty; but, with true Christian charity, accommodated themselves in matters of indifference to the prejudices of their weaker brethren. But he who changes his conduct with a change of sentiments, proceeding from an increase of knowledge, is not ambiguous in his conduct; nor should he be accused of a culpable duplicity, who in a matter of the last importance endeavours to conciliate the good-will of all, by conforming in a few innocent observances to the particular persuasions of different men.

One

One remark more, and I have done. In your account of the Gnostics, you have given us a very minute catalogue of the objections, which they made to the authority of Moses, from his account of the creation, of the patriarchs, of the law, and of the attributes of the Deity: I have not leisure to examine, whether the Gnostics of former ages really made all the objections you have mentioned. I take it for granted, upon your authority, that they did: but I am certain if they did, that the Gnostics of modern times have no reason to be puffed up with their knowledge, or to be had in admiration as men of subtile penetration or refined erudition; they are all miserable copiers of their brethren of antiquity; and neither Morgan, nor Tindal, nor Bolingbroke, nor Voltaire, have been able to produce scarce a single new objection. You think, that the Fathers have not properly answered the Gnostics. I make no question, Sir, you are able to answer them to your own satisfaction; and informed of every thing that has been said by our *industrious divines* upon the subject: and we should have been

been glad, if it had fallen in with your plan to have administered together with the poison it's antidote; but since that is not the case, lest it's malignity should spread too far, I must just mention it to my younger readers, that Leland and others, in their replies to the modern Deists, have given very full, and, as many learned men apprehend, very satisfactory answers to every one of the objections, which you have derived from the Gnostic heresy.

I am, &c.

LET-

## LETTER SECOND.

SIR,

“THE doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance, which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth,” is the second of the causes to which you attribute the quick increase of Christianity. Now if we impartially consider the circumstances of the persons to whom the doctrine, not simply of a future life, but of a future life accompanied with punishments as well as rewards; not only of the immortality of the soul, but of the immortality of the soul accompanied with that of the resurrection, was delivered; I cannot be of opinion that, abstracted from the supernatural testimony by which it was enforced, it could have met with any very extensive reception amongst them.

It



It was not that kind of future life, which they expected ; it did not hold out to them the punishments of the infernal regions, as *aniles fabulas* : to the question, *Quid si post mortem maneat animi?* they could not answer with Cicero and the philosophers,—*Beatos esse concedo* ;—because there was a great probability, that it might be quite otherwise with them. I am not to learn, that there are passages to be picked up in the writings of the ancients, which might be produced as proofs of their expecting a future state of punishment for the flagitious ; but this opinion was worn out of credit, before the time of our Saviour : the whole disputation in the first book of the *Tusculan Questions*, goes upon the other supposition : nor was the absurdity of the doctrine of future punishments confined to the writings of the philosophers, or the circles of the learned and polite ; for Cicero, to mention no others, makes no secret of it in his public pleadings before the people at large. You yourself, Sir, have referred to his oration for *Cluentius*, in this oration, you may remember, he makes great  
mention

mention of a very abandoned fellow, who had forged I know not how many wills, murdered I know not how many wives, and perpetrated a thousand other villainies; yet even to this profligate, by name Oppianicus, he is persuaded, that death was not the occasion of any evil\*. Hence, I think, we may conclude, that such of the Romans, as were not wholly infected with the annihilating notions of Epicurus, but entertained, (whether from remote tradition, or enlightened argumentation) hopes of a future life, had no manner of expectation of such a life, as included in it the severity of punishment, denounced in the Christian scheme against the wicked.

Nor was it that kind of future life, which they wished; they would have been glad enough of an Elysium, which could have admitted into it men who had spent this life,  
in

\* Nam nunc quidem quid tandem mali illi mors attulit? nisi forte ineptiis ac fabulis ducimur, ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre; ac plures illic offendisse inimicos quam hic reliquisse—quæ si falsa sint, id quod omnes intelligunt, &c.

in the perpetration of every vice, which can debase and pollute the human heart. To abandon every seducing gratification of sense, to pluck up every latent root of ambition, to subdue every impulse of revenge, to divest themselves of every inveterate habit, in which their glory and their pleasure consisted; to do all this and more, before they could look up to the doctrine of a future life, without terror and amazement, was not, one would think, an easy undertaking; nor was it likely, that many would forsake the religious institutions of their ancestors, set at nought the gods, under whose auspices the Capitol had been founded, and Rome made mistress of the world, and suffer themselves to be persuaded into the belief of a tenet, the very mention of which made Felix tremble, by any thing less than a full conviction of the supernatural authority of those who taught it.

The several schools of Gentile philosophy had discussed, with no small subtlety, every argument, which reason could suggest, for

for and against the immortality of the soul; and those uncertain glimmerings of the light of nature, would have prepared the minds of the learned for the reception of the full illustration of this subject by the gospel, had not the resurrection been a part of the doctrine therein advanced. But that this corporal frame, which is hourly mouldering away, and resolved at last into the undistinguished mass of elements, from which it was at first derived, should ever be *cloathed with immortality; that this corruptible should ever put on incorruption*, is a truth so far removed from the apprehension of philosophical research, so dissonant from the common conceptions of mankind, that amongst all ranks and persuasions of men it was esteemed an impossible thing. At Athens the philosophers had listened with patience to St. Paul, whilst they conceived him but a *setter forth of strange gods*; but as soon as they comprehended, that by the *αναστασις*, he meant the resurrection; they turned from him with contempt. It was principally the insisting upon the same topic, which made Festus think, *that*



*that much learning had made him mad: and the questions, how are the dead raised up? and, with what body do they come?* seem, by Paul's solicitude to answer them with fullness and precision, to have been not unfrequently proposed to him, by those who were desirous of becoming Christians.

The doctrine of a future life then, as promulged in the gospel, being neither agreeable to the expectations, nor corresponding with the wishes, nor conformable to the reason of the Gentiles, I can discover no motive, (setting aside the true one, the divine power of it's first preachers) which could induce them to receive it; and in consequence of their belief, to conform their loose morals to the rigid standard of gospel purity, upon the mere authority of a few contemptible fishermen of Judea. And even you yourself, Sir, seem to have changed your opinion, concerning the efficacy of the expectation of a future life in converting the Heathens, when you observe in the following chapter, that "the Pagan multitude, reserving their  
"gratitude

“gratitude for temporal benefits alone, rejected the inestimable present of life and  
 “immortality, which was offered to mankind  
 “by Jesus of Nazareth.”

Montesquieu is of opinion, that it will ever be impossible for Christianity to establish itself in China and the east, from this circumstance, that it prohibits a plurality of wives: how then could it have been possible for it to have pervaded the voluptuous Capital, and traversed the utmost limits of the empire of Rome, by the feeble efforts of human industry, or human knavery?

But the Gentiles, you are of opinion, were converted by their fears; and reckon the doctrines of Christ's speedy appearance, of the millennium, and of the general conflagration, amongst those additional circumstances, which gave weight to that concerning a future state. Before I proceed to the examination of the efficiency of these several circumstances, in alarming the apprehensions of the Gentiles, what if I should grant  
 your

your position? still the main question recurs, From what source did they derive the fears, which converted them? Not surely from the mere human labours of men, who were every where spoken against, made a spectacle of, and considered as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things—not surely from the human powers of him, who professed himself *rude in speech, in bodily presence contemptible*, and a despiser of *the excellency of speech, and the enticing words of mens wisdom*. No, such wretched instruments were but ill fitted, to inspire the haughty, and the learned Romans, with any other passions than those of pity, or contempt.

Now, Sir, if you please, we will consider that universal expectation of the approaching end of the world, which, you think, had such great influence in converting the Pagans to the profession of Christianity. The near approach, you say, of this wonderful event had been predicted by the Apostles, “ though  
 “ the revolution of seventeen centuries  
 “ has instructed us, not to press too closely  
 “ the

“the mysterious language of prophecy and  
 “revelation.” That this opinion, even in  
 the times of the Apostles, had made its way  
 into the Christian church, I readily admit;  
 but that the Apostles ever, either predicted  
 this event to others, or cherished the expect-  
 ation of it in themselves, does not seem  
 probable to me. As this is a point of some  
 difficulty and importance, you will suffer me  
 to explain it at some length.

It must be owned, that there are several  
 passages in the writings of the Apostles,  
 which, at the first view, seem to countenance  
 the opinion you have adopted. Now, says St.  
 Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, *it is high  
 time to awake out of sleep; for now is our  
 salvation nearer than when we believed: the  
 night is far spent, the day is at hand.* And  
 in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, he  
 comforts such of them as were sorrowing for  
 the loss of their friends, by assuring them  
 that they were not lost for ever; but that  
 the Lord when he came, would bring them  
 with him; and that they would not, in the



participation of any blessings, be in any wise behind those, who should happen then to be alive; *we*, says he, (the Christians of whatever age or country, agreeable to a frequent use of the pronoun *we*) *which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then, we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord.* In his epistle to the Philippians, he exhorts his Christian brethren, not to disquiet themselves with carking cares about their temporal concerns, from this powerful consideration, that the Lord was at hand; *let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand; be careful about nothing.* The Apostle to the Hebrews, inculcates the same doctrine, admonishing his converts *to provoke one another to love, and to good works; and so much the more, as they saw the day approaching.* The age in which the Apostles lived, is frequently  
called

called by them the end of the world, the last days, the last hour. I think it unnecessary, Sir, to trouble you with an explication of these and other similar texts of scripture, which are usually adduced in support of your opinion; since I hope to be able to give you a direct proof, that the Apostles neither comforted themselves, nor encouraged others with the delightful hope of seeing their master coming again into the world. It is evident then, that St. John, who survived all the other Apostles, could not have had any such expectation; since in the Book of the Revelation, the future events of the Christian church, which were not to take place, many of them, till a long series of years after his death, and some of which have not yet been accomplished, are there minutely described. St. Peter, in like manner, strongly intimates, that the day of the Lord might be said to be at hand, though it was at the distance of a thousand years or more; for in replying to the taunt of those who did then, or should in future ask, *Where is the promise of his coming?* he says, *Be-*

*loved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day : the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness. And he speaks of putting off his tabernacle, as the Lord had shewed him ; and of his endeavour, that the Christians after his decease, might be able to have these things in remembrance : so that it is past a doubt, he could not be of opinion, that the Lord would come in his time. As to St. Paul, upon a partial view of whose writings the doctrine concerning the speedy coming of Christ is principally founded ; it is manifest, that he was conscious he should not live to see it, notwithstanding the expression before mentioned, *we which are alive* ; for he foretells his own death in express terms—*the time of my departure is at hand* ; and he speaks of his reward, not as immediately to be conferred on him ; but as laid up, and reserved for him till some future day—I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course ; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall*

*shall give me at that day.* There is moreover one passage in his writings, which is so express, and full to the purpose, that it will put the matter, I think, beyond all doubt; it occurs in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians: They, it seems, had either by misinterpreting some parts of his former letter to them, or by the preaching of some, who had not the spirit of truth; by some means or other, they had been led to expect the speedy coming of Christ, and been greatly disturbed in mind upon that account: To remove this error, he writes to them in the following very solemn and affectionate manner: *We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand; let no man deceive you by any means.* He then goes on to describe a falling away, a great corruption of the Christian church, which was to happen before the day of the Lord: now by this revelation of the man of sin, this mystery  
of



of iniquity, which is to be consumed with the spirit of his mouth, destroyed with the brightness of his coming, we have every reason to believe, is to be understood the past and present abominations of the church of Rome. How then can it be said of Paul, who clearly foresaw this corruption above seventeen hundred years ago, that he expected the coming of the Lord in his own day? Let us press, Sir, the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation, as closely as you please; but let us press it truly; and we may, perhaps, find reason from thence to receive, with less reluctance, a religion, which describes a corruption, the strangeness of which, had it not been foretold in unequivocal terms, might have amazed even a friend to Christianity.

I will produce you, Sir, a prophecy, which, the more closely you press it, the more reason you will have to believe, that the speedy coming of Christ could never have been *predicted* by the Apostles. Take it, as translated by Bishop Newton: *But the Spirit*  
*speaketh*

*speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall apostatize from the faith; giving heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons, through the hypocrisy of liars; having their conscience seared with a red hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.*—Here you have an express prophecy—the spirit hath spoken it—that in the latter times—not immediately, but at some distant period—some should apostatize from the faith—some, who had been Christians, should in truth be so no longer—but should give heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons:—Press this expression closely, and you may, perhaps, discover in it the erroneous tenets, and the demon, or saint worship of the church of Rome;—through the hypocrisy of liars:—you recognize, no doubt, the priesthood, and the martyrologists;—having their conscience seared with a red hot iron:—callous, indeed, must his conscience be, who traffics in indulgences;—forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats:—this language needs no pressing; it discovers, at once, the unhappy

unhappy votaries of monastic life, and the mortal sin of eating flesh on fast days.

If, notwithstanding what has been said, you should still be of opinion, that the Apostles expected Christ would come in their time; it will not follow, that this their error ought in any wise to diminish their authority as preachers of the gospel. I am sensible, this position may alarm even some well-wishers to Christianity; and supply its enemies with, what they will think, an irrefragable argument: the Apostles, they will say, were inspired with the spirit of truth; and yet they fell into a gross mistake, concerning a matter of great importance; how is this to be reconciled? Perhaps, in the following manner: When the time of our Saviour's ministry was nearly at an end, he thought proper to raise the spirits of his disciples, who were quite cast down with what he had told them about his design of leaving them; by promising, that he would send to them the holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth; who should teach them all things, and lead them into all truth. And

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we know, that this his promise was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the holy Ghost; and we know farther, that from that time forward, they were enabled to speak with tongues, to work miracles, to preach the word with power, and to comprehend the mystery of the new dispensation, which was committed unto them. But we have no reason from hence to conclude, that they were immediately inspired with the apprehension of whatever might be known; that they became acquainted with all kinds of truth: they were undoubtedly led into such truths, as it was necessary for them to know, in order to their converting the world to Christianity; but in other things, they were probably left to the exercise of their understandings, as other men usually are. But surely they might be proper witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ, though they were not acquainted with every thing, which might have been known; though, in particular, they were ignorant of the precise time, when our Lord would come to judge the world.

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It can be no impeachment, either of their integrity as men, or their ability as historians, or their honesty as preachers of the gospel, that they were unacquainted with what had never been revealed to them; that they followed their own understandings, where they had no better light to guide them; speaking from conjecture, when they could not speak from certainty; of themselves, when they had no commandment of the Lord. They knew but in part, and they prophesied but in part; and concerning this particular point, Jesus himself had told them, just as he was about finally to leave them, that it was not for them to *know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power*. Nor is it to be wondered at, that the Apostles were left in a state of uncertainty, concerning the time in which Christ should appear; since Beings, far more exalted and more highly favoured of heaven than they, were under an equal degree of ignorance: *Of that day, says our Saviour, and of that hour, knoweth no one; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither*  
*the*

*the Son, but the Father only.* I am afraid, Sir, I have tired you with scripture quotations ; but if I have been fortunate enough to convince you, either that the speedy coming of Christ was never expected, much less *predicted*, by the Apostles ; or that their mistake in that particular expectation, can in no degree diminish the general weight of their testimony as historians, I shall not be sorry for the *ennui* I may have occasioned you.

The doctrine of the Millennium, is the second of the circumstances which you produce, as giving weight to that of a future state ; and you represent this doctrine as having been “ carefully inculcated by a succession of the fathers, from Justin Martyr “ and Irenæus down to Lactantius ;” and observe, that when “ the edifice of the “ church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside ;” and in the notes, you refer us, as a proof of what you advance, to “ Irenæus, the disciple of Papias, who had seen the Apostle St. John,”  
and

and to the second Dialogue of Justin with Trypho.

I wish, Sir, you had turned to Eusebius, for the character of this Papias, who had seen the Apostle St. John; you would there have found him represented as little better than a credulous old woman; very averse from reading, but mightily given to picking up stories and traditions next to fabulous; amongst which Eusebius reckons this of the Millennium one. Nor is it, I apprehend, quite certain, that Papias ever saw, much less discoursed, as seems to be insinuated, with the Apostle St. John. Eusebius thinks rather, that it was John the Presbyter he had seen. But what if he had seen the Apostle himself? many a weak-headed man had undoubtedly seen him, as well as Papias; and it would be hard indeed upon Christians, if they were compelled to receive as apostolical traditions, the wild reveries of ancient enthusiasm, or such crude conceptions of ignorant fanaticism, as nothing but the rust of antiquity can render venerable.

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As to the works of Justin, the very Dialogue you refer to contains a proof, that the doctrine of the Millennium had not, even in his time, the universal reception you have supposed; but that many Christians of pure and pious principles rejected it. I wonder, how this passage escaped you; but it may be, that you followed Tillotson, who himself followed Mede, and read in the original *υ*, instead of *αν*; and thus unwarily violated the idiom of the language, the sense of the context, and the authority of the best editions. \* In the note you observe, that it is unnecessary for you to mention all the inter-

\* Justin, in answering the question proposed by Trypho, Whether the Christians believed the doctrine of the Millennium, says, *Ὁμολογησα ἂν σοὶ καὶ προτέρον, ὅτι ἐγὼ μὲν καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ ταῦτα φρονοῦμεν, ὡς καὶ πάντας ἐπίσαςδε, τέτο γνητομένογ. Πολλὰς δ' αὖ καὶ τῶν τῆς ΚΑΘΑΡΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΣΕΒΟΥΣ ὄντων Χριστιανῶν ΓΝΩΜΗΣ τέτο μὴ γνωρίζειν, εἰσημῶνα σοὶ.* The note subjoined to this passage out of Justin, in Thirlby's Ed. an. 1722. is, *Πολλὰς δ' αὖ καὶ τῶν τῆς καθαρᾶς*] Medus (quem sequitur Tillotsonus, Reg. Fidei per. iii. sect. 9. p. 756. & seq.) legit *τῶν υ τῆς καθαρᾶς.* Vehementer errant viri præclari.

And in Jebb's Edit. an. 1719. we have the following note: *Doctrina itaque de Millennio, neque erat universalis ecclesiæ traditio, nec opinio de fide recepta, &c.*



intermediate fathers between Justin and Lactantius, as the fact, you say, is not disputed. In a man, who has read so many books, and to so good a purpose, he must be captious indeed, who cannot excuse small mistakes : that unprejudiced regard to truth, however, which is the great characteristic of every distinguished historian, will, I am persuaded, make you thank me for recalling to your memory, that Origen, the most learned of all the fathers, and Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, usually for his immense erudition surnamed the Great, were both of them prior to Lactantius, and both of them impugnors of the Millennium doctrine. Look, Sir, into Mosheim, or almost any writer of ecclesiastical history ; and you will find the opposition of Origen and Dionysius to this system, particularly noticed : look into so common an author as Whitby ; and in his learned treatise upon this subject, you will find he has well proved these two propositions ; first, that this opinion of the Millennium was never generally received in the church of Christ ; secondly, that there is no  
just

just ground to think it was derived from the Apostles. From hence, I think, we may conclude, that this Millennium doctrine, (which, by the bye, though it be new modelled, is not yet thrown aside) could not have been any very serviceable scaffold, in the erection of that mighty edifice, which has crushed by the weight of it's materials, and debased by the elegance of it's structure, the stateliest tempels of heathen superstition. With these remarks, I take leave of the Millennium; just observing, that your third circumstance, the general conflagration, seems to be effectually included in your first, the speedy coming of Christ.

I am, Sir, &c.

LET-

## LETTER THIRD.

SIR,

**Y**OU esteem “ the miraculous powers “ ascribed to the primitive church,” as the third of the secondary causes of the rapid growth of Christianity ; I should be willing to account the miracles, not merely ascribed to the primitive church, but really performed by the Apostles, as the one great primary cause of the conversion of the Gentiles. But waving this consideration, let us see whether the miraculous powers, which you ascribe to the primitive church, were in any eminent degree calculated to spread the belief of Christianity amongst a great, and an enlightened people.

They consisted, you tell us, “ of divine “ inspirations, conveyed sometimes in the “ form of a sleeping, sometimes of a waking “ vision ;

" vision; and were liberally bestowed on all  
 " ranks of the faithful, on women as on  
 " elders, on boys, as well as upon Bishops."  
 " The design of these visions, you say, was  
 " for the most part either to disclose the fu-  
 " ture history, or to guide the present ad-  
 " ministration of the church." " You speak  
 " of the expulsion of Demons as an ordinary  
 " triumph of religion, usually performed in  
 " a public manner; and when the patient  
 " was relieved by the skill or the power of  
 " the Exorcist, the vanquished Demon was  
 " heard to confess, that he was one of the  
 " fabled gods of antiquity, who had impi-  
 " ously usurped the adoration of mankind ;"  
 and you represent even the miracle of the  
 resurrection of the dead, as frequently  
 performed on necessary occasions.—Cast your  
 eye, Sir, on the church of Rome, and ask  
 yourself, (I put the question to your heart,  
 and beg you will consult that for an answer;  
 ask yourself) whether her absurd pretensi-  
 ons to that very kind of miraculous powers,  
 you have here displayed as operating to the  
 increase of Christianity, have not converted



half her numbers to Protestantism, and the other half to Infidelity? Neither the sword of the civil magistrate, nor the possession of the keys of heaven, nor the terrors of her spiritual thunder, have been able to keep within her pale, even those who have been bred up in her faith; how then should you think, that the very cause, which hath almost extinguished Christianity amongst Christians, should have established it amongst Pagans? I beg, I may not be understood: I do not take upon me to say, that all the miracles recorded in the history of the primitive church after the apostolical age, were forgeries; it is foreign to the present purpose to deliver any opinion upon that subject; but I do beg leave to insist upon this, that such of them as were forgeries, must in that learned age, by their easy detection, have rather impeded, than accelerated the progress of Christianity: and it appears very probable to me, that nothing but the recent prevailing evidence, of real, unquestioned, apostolical miracles, could have secured the  
 infant

infant church from being destroyed by those, which were falsely ascribed to it.

It is not every man, who can nicely separate the corruptions of religion from religion itself; nor justly apportion the degrees of credit due to the diversities of evidence; and those, who have ability for the task, are usually ready enough to emancipate themselves from gospel restraints, (which thwart the propensities of sense, check the ebullitions of passion, and combat the prejudices of the world at every turn) by blending it's native simplicity with the superstitions, which have been derived from it. No argument so well suited to the indolence or the immorality of mankind, as that priests of all ages and religions are the same; we see the pretensions of the Romish priesthood to miraculous powers, and we know them to be false; we are conscious, that they at least must sacrifice their integrity to their interest, or their ambition; and being persuaded, that there is a great sameness in the passions of mankind, and in their incentives to action;

and knowing, that the history of past ages is abundantly stored with similar claims to supernatural authority, we traverse back in imagination the most distant regions of antiquity ; and finding, from a superficial view, nothing to discriminate one set of men, or one period of time from another ; we hastily conclude, that all revealed religion is a cheat, and that the miracles attributed to the Apostles themselves, are supported by no better testimony, nor more worthy our attention, than the prodigies of Pagan story, or the lying wonders of papal artifice. I have no intention in this place, to enlarge upon the many circumstances, by which a candid inquirer after truth might be enabled to distinguish a pointed difference between the miracles of Christ and his Apostles, and the tricks of ancient or modern superstition. One observation I would just suggest to you upon the subject ; the miracles recorded in the old and new Testament, are so intimately united with the narration of common events, and the ordinary transactions of life, that you cannot, as in profane history, separate the  
one

one from the other. My meaning will be illustrated by an instance : Tacitus and Suetonius have handed down to us an account of many great actions performed by Vespasian ; amongst the rest, they inform us of his having wrought some miracles, of his having cured a lame man, and restored sight to one that was blind. But what they tell us of these miracles, is so unconnected with every thing that goes before and after, that you may reject the relation of them without injuring, in any degree, the consistency of the narration of the other circumstances of his life : On the other hand, if you reject the relation of the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus Christ, you must necessarily reject the account of his whole life, and of several transactions, concerning which we have the undoubted testimony of other writers besides the Evangelists. But if this argument should not strike you, perhaps the following observation may tend to remove a little of the prejudice, usually conceived against gospel miracles, by men of lively ima-



imagination, from the gross forgeries attributed to the first ages of the church.

The phænomena of physics are sometimes happily illustrated by an Hypothesis ; and the most recondite truths of Mathematical science not unfrequently investigated, from an absurd position ; what if we should try the same method of arguing in the case before us. Let us suppose then, that a new revelation was to be promulged to mankind, and that twelve unlearned and unfriended men, inhabitants of any country most odious and despicable in the eyes of Europe, should by the power of God be endowed with the faculty of speaking languages they had never learned, and performing works surpassing all human ability ; and that being strongly impressed with a particular truth, which they were commissioned to promulgate, they should travel, not only through the barbarous regions of Africa, but through all the learned and polished states of Europe ; preaching every where with unremitted sedulity a new religion, working stupendous miracles in attestation

testation of their mission, and communicating to their first converts (as a seal of their conversion) a variety of spiritual gifts; does it appear probable to you, that after the death of these men, and probably after the deaths of most of their immediate successors, who had been zealously attached to the faith they had seen so miraculously confirmed, that none would ever attempt to impose upon the credulous or the ignorant, by a fictitious claim to supernatural powers? would none of them aspire to the gift of tongues? would none of them mistake phrensy for illumination, and the delusions of a heated brain for the impulses of the spirit? would none undertake to cure inveterate disorders, to expel Demons, or to raise the dead? As far as I can apprehend, we ought, from such a position, to deduce, by every rule of probable reasoning, the precise conclusion, which was in fact verified in the case of the Apostles; every species of miracles, which heaven had enabled the first preachers to perform, would be counterfeited, either from misguided zeal, or interested cunning; either  
 through

through the imbecility, or the iniquity of mankind; and we might just as reasonably conclude, that there never was any piety, charity, or chastity in the world, from seeing such plenty of pretenders to these virtues, as that there never were any real miracles performed, from considering the great store of those, which have been forged.

But, I know not how it has happened, there are many in the present age (I am far from including you, Sir, in the number) whose prejudices against all miraculous events have arisen to that height, that it appears to them utterly impossible for any human testimony, however great, to establish their credibility. I beg pardon for styling their reasoning, prejudice; I have no design to give offence by that word; they may, with equal right, throw the same imputation upon mine; and I think it just as illiberal in Divines, to attribute the scepticism of every Deist to wilful infidelity; as it is in the Deist, to refer the faith of every Divine to professional bias. I have not had so little intercourse with mankind, nor  
shunned

shunned so much the delightful freedom of social converse, as to be ignorant, that there are many men of upright morals and good understandings, to whom, as you express it, "a latent and even involuntary scepticism adheres;" and who would be glad to be persuaded to be Christians: and how severe soever some men may be in their judgments concerning one another; yet we Christians at least, hope, and believe, that the great Judge of all will make allowance for "our habits of study and reflection," for various circumstances, the efficacy of which in giving a particular bent to the understandings of men, we can neither comprehend, nor estimate. For the sake of such men, if such should ever be induced to throw an hour away in the perusal of these letters, suffer me to step for a moment out of my way, whilst I hazard an observation or two upon the subject.

Knowledge is rightly divided by Mr. Locke into intuitive, sensitive, and demonstrative; it is clear, that a past miracle can neither be  
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the object of sense, nor of intuition, nor consequently of demonstration ; we cannot then, philosophically speaking, be said to know, that a miracle has ever been performed. But in all the great concerns of life, we are influenced by probability, rather than knowledge : and of probability, the same great author establishes two foundations ; a conformity to our own experience, and the testimony of others. Now it is contended, that by the opposition of these two principles, probability is destroyed ; or, in other terms, that human testimony can never influence the mind to assent to a proposition repugnant to uniform experience.—Whose experience do you mean? you will not say, your own ; for the experience of an individual reaches but a little way ; and no doubt, you daily assent to a thousand truths in politics, in physics, and in the business of common life, which you have never seen verified by experience.—You will not produce the experience of your friends ; for that can extend itself but a little way, beyond your own.—But by uniform

form experience, I conceive, you are desirous of understanding the experience of all ages and nations since the foundation of the world. I answer, first; how is it, that you become acquainted with the experience of all ages and nations? You will reply, from history.—Be it so:—peruse then, by far the most ancient records of antiquity; and if you find no mention of miracles in them, I give up the point. Yes;—but every thing related therein respecting miracles, is to be reckoned fabulous.—Why?—Because miracles contradict the experience of all ages and nations. Do you not perceive, Sir, that you beg the very question in debate? for we affirm, that the great and learned nation of Egypt, that the Heathen inhabiting the land of Canaan, that the numerous people of the Jews, and the nations, which, for ages, surrounded them, have all had great experience of miracles. You cannot otherways obviate this conclusion, than by questioning the authenticity of that book; concerning which, Newton, when he was writing his Commentary on Daniel, expressed

expressed himself to the person,\* from whom I had the anecdote, and which deserves not to be lost; "I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible, than in any profane history whatsoever."

However, I mean not to press you with the argument *ad verecundiam*; it is needless to solicit your modesty, when it may be possible, perhaps, to make an impression upon your judgment: I answer therefore, in the second place, that the admission of the principle, by which you reject miracles, will lead us into absurdity. The laws of gravitation, are the most obvious of all the laws of nature; every person in every part of the globe, must of necessity have had experience of them: There was a time, when no one was acquainted with the laws of magnetism; these suspend in many instances the laws of gravity; nor can I see, upon the principle in question, how the rest of mankind could have

\* Dr Smith, late Master of Trinity College.

have credited the testimony of their first discoverer; and yet to have rejected it, would have been to reject the truth. But that a piece of iron should ascend gradually from the earth, and fly at last with an increasing rapidity through the air; and attaching itself to another piece of iron, or to a particular species of iron ore, should remain suspended in opposition to the action of it's gravity, is consonant to the laws of nature. —I grant it; but there was a time, when it was contrary, I say not to the laws of nature, but to the uniform experience of all preceding ages and countries; and at that particular point of time, the testimony of an individual, or of a dozen individuals, who should have reported themselves eye witnesses of such a fact, ought, according to your argumentation, to have been received as fabulous. And what are those laws of nature, which, you think, can never be suspended? are they not different to different men, according to the diversities of their comprehension and knowledge? and if any one of them,



them, (that, for instance, which rules the operations of magnetism or electricity) should have been known to you or to me alone, whilst all the rest of the world were unacquainted with it; the effects of it would have been new, and unheard of in the annals, and contrary to the experience of mankind; and therefore ought not, in your opinion, to have been believed. Nor do I understand, what difference, as to credibility, there could be, between the effects of such an unknown law of nature and a miracle; for it is a matter of no moment, in that view, whether the suspension of the known laws of nature be effected; that is, whether a miracle be performed, by the mediation of other laws that are unknown, or by the ministry of a person divinely commissioned; since it is impossible for us to be certain, that it is contradictory to the constitution of the universe, that the laws of nature, which appear to us general, should not be suspended, and their action overruled by others, still more general, though less known; that is, that miracles

cles should not be performed before such a Being as Man, at those times, in those places, and under those circumstances, which God, in his universal providence, had pre-ordained.

I am, &c.

LET-

## LETTER FOURTH.

S I R,

I Readily acknowledge the utility of your fourth cause, " the virtues of the first Christians," as greatly conducing to the spreading their religion ; but then you seem to quite mar the compliment you pay them, by representing their virtues, as proceeding either from their repentance for having been the most abandoned finners, or from the laudable desire of supporting the reputation of the society, in which they were engaged.

That repentance is the first step to virtue, is true enough ; but I see no reason for supposing, according to the calumnies of Celsus and Julian, " that the Christians allured into their party, men, who washed away in the waters of baptism the guilt, for which the temples of the gods refused to grant them  
any

any expiation." The Apostles, Sir, did not like Romulus, open an asylum for debtors, thieves, and murderers; for they had not the same sturdy means of securing their adherents from the grasp of civil power; they did not persuade them to abandon the temples of the gods, because they could there obtain no expiation for their guilt; but because every degree of guilt, was expiated in them with too great facility; and every vice practised, not only without remorse of private conscience, but with the powerful sanction of public approbation.

"After the example, you say, of their Divine Master, the missionaries of the gospel addressed themselves to men, and especially to women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often by the effects of their vices."—This, Sir, I really think, is not a fair representation of the matter; it may catch the applause of the unlearned, embolden many a stripling to cast off for ever the sweet blush of modesty, confirm many a dissolute veteran in the practice of his im-

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pure



pure habits, and suggest great occasion of merriment and wanton mockery to the flagitious of every denomination and every age ; but still it will want that foundation of truth, which alone can recommend it to the serious and judicious. The Apostles, Sir, were not like the Italian *Fratricelli* of the thirteenth, nor the French *Turlupins* of the fourteenth century ; in all the dirt that has been raked up against Christianity, even by the worst of it's enemies, not a speck of that kind have they been able to fix, either upon the Apostles, or their Divine Master. The gospel of Jesus Christ, Sir, was not preached in single houses, or obscure villages, not in subterraneous caves and impure brothels, not in lazars and in prisons ; but in the synagogues and in the temples, in the streets and in the market-places of the great capitals of the Roman provinces ; in Jerusalems, in Corinth, and in Antioch, in Athens, in Ephesus, and in Rome. Nor do I any where find, that it's missionaries were ordered particularly to address themselves to the shameless women you mention ; I do indeed find the direct contrary ;

contrary ; for they were ordered to turn away from, to have no fellowship or intercourse with such, as were wont *to creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.* And what if a few women, who had either been seduced by their passions, or had fallen victims to the licentious manners of their age, should be found amongst those, who were most ready to receive a religion that forbad all impurity ? I do not apprehend, that this circumstance ought to bring an insinuation of discredit, either upon the sex, or upon those who wrought their reformation.

That the majority of the first converts to Christianity, were of an inferior condition in life, may readily be allowed ; and you yourself have in another place given a good reason for it ; those who are distinguished by riches, honours, or knowledge, being so very inconsiderable in number, when compared with the bulk of mankind : But though not many mighty, not many noble, were called ; yet some mighty, and some

noble, some of as great reputation as any of the age in which they lived, were attached to the Christian faith. Short indeed are the accounts, which have been transmitted to us, of the first propagating of Christianity; yet even in these, we meet with the names of many, who would have done credit to any cause; I will not pretend to enumerate them all, a few of them will be sufficient to make you recollect, that there were, at least, some converts to Christianity, both from among the Jews and the Gentiles, whose lives were not stained with inextinguishable crimes. Amongst these we reckon Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, Joseph of Arimathea, a man of fortune and a counsellor, a nobleman and a centurion of Capernaum, Jairus, Crispus, Sosthenes, rulers of synagogues, Apollos an eloquent and learned man, Zenas a Jewish lawyer, the treasurer of Candace queen of Æthiopia, Cornelius a centurion of the Italian band, Dionysius a member of the Areopagus at Athens, and Sergius Paulus, a man of proconsular or prætorian authority, of whom it may be remarked, that if he resign-

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ed his high and lucrative office in consequence of his turning Christian, it is a strong presumption in it's favour ; if he retained it, we may conclude, that the profession of Christianity was not so utterly incompatible with the discharge of the offices of civil life, as you sometimes represent it. This Catalogue of men of rank, fortune, and knowledge, who embraced Christianity, might, was it necessary, be much enlarged ; and probably another conversation with St. Paul would have enabled us to grace it with the names of Festus, and king Agrippa himself ; not that the writers of the Books of the new Testament seem to have been at all solicitous, in mentioning the great or the learned, who were converted to the faith : had that been part of their design, they would, in the true stile of impostors, have kept out of sight the publicans and sinners, the tanners and the tent-makers with whom they conversed and dwelt ; and introduced to our notice none but those, who had been *brought up with Herod, or the chief men of Asia*—whom they



had the honour to number amongst their friends.

That the Primitive Christians took great care to have an unfullied reputation, by abstaining from the commission of whatever might tend to pollute it, is easily admitted; but we do not so easily grant that this care is a "circumstance, which usually attends "small assemblies of men, when they separate themselves from the body of a nation, "or the religion to which they belong." It did not attend the Nicolaitanes, the Simonians, the Menandrians, and the Carpocratians in the first ages of the church, of which you are speaking; and it cannot be unknown to you, Sir, that the scandalous vices of these very early Sectaries, brought a general and undistinguished censure upon the Christian name; and so far from promoting the increase of the church, excited in the minds of the Pagans an abhorrence of whatever respected it; it cannot be unknown to you, Sir, that several Sectaries both at home and  
abroad

abroad might be mentioned, who have departed from the religion to which they belonged; and which, unhappily for themselves and the community, have taken as little care to preserve their reputation unspotted, as those of the first and second centuries. If then the first Christians did take the care you mention, (and I am wholly of your opinion in that point) their sollicitude might as candidly, perhaps, and as reasonably be derived from a sense of their duty, and an honest endeavour to discharge it, as from the mere desire of increasing the honour of their confraternity by the illustrious integrity of it's members.

You are eloquent in describing the austere morality of the primitive Christians, as adverse to the propensities of sense, and abhorrent from all the innocent pleasures and amusements of life; and you enlarge, with a studied minuteness, upon their censures of luxury, and their sentiments concerning marriage and chastity;—but in this circumstantial

stantial enumeration of their errors or their faults, (which I am under no necessity of denying or excusing) you seem to forget the very purpose, for which you profess to have introduced the mention of them; for the picture you have drawn is so hideous, and the colouring so dismal, that instead of alluring to a closer inspection, it must have made every man of pleasure or of sense turn from it with horror or disgust; and so far from contributing to the rapid growth of Christianity by the austerity of their manners, it must be a wonder to any one, how the first Christians ever made a single convert.—It was first objected by Celsus, that Christianity was a mean religion, inculcating such a pusillanimity and patience under affronts, such a contempt of riches and worldly honours, as must weaken the nerves of civil government, and expose a society of Christians to the prey of the first invaders. This objection has been repeated by Bayle; and though fully answered by Bernard and others, it is still the favourite theme of

of every Esprit fort of our own age : even you, Sir, think the aversion of Christians to the business of war and government, " a criminal disregard to the public welfare." To all that has been said upon this subject, it may with justice, I think, be answered, that Christianity troubles not itself with ordering the constitutions of civil societies ; but levels the weight of all it's influence at the hearts of the individuals which compose them ; and as Celsus said to Origen, was every individual in every nation a gospel Christian, there would be neither internal injustice, nor external war ; there would be none of those passions, which imbitter the intercourses of civil life, and desolate the globe. What reproach then can it be to a religion, that it inculcates doctrines, which, if universally practised, would introduce universal tranquillity, and the most exalted happiness amongst mankind ?

It



It must proceed from a total misapprehension of the design of the Christian dispensation, or from a very ignorant interpretation of the particular injunctions, forbidden us to make riches or honours a primary pursuit, or the prompt gratification of revenge a first principle of action, to infer,—that an individual Christian is obliged by his religion to offer his throat to an assassin, and his property to the first plunderer; or that a society of Christians may not repel, in the best manner they are able, the unjust assaults of hostile invasion.

I know of no precepts in the gospel, which debar a man from the possession of domestic comforts, or deaden the activity of his private friendships, or prohibit the exertion of his utmost ability in the service of the public; the—*nisi quietum nihil beatum*—is no part of the Christian's Creed; his virtue, is an active virtue; and we justly refer to the school of Epicurus, the doctrines concerning abstinence from marriage, from the cultivation

tion of friendship, from the management of public affairs, as suited to that selfish indolence, which was the favourite tenet of his philosophy.

I am, Sir, &c.

LET-

## LETTER FIFTH.

SIR,

“**T**HE union and the discipline of the “Christian church,” or, as you are pleased to stile it, of the Christian republic, is the last of the five secondary causes, to which you have referred the rapid and extensive spread of Christianity. It must be acknowledged, that union essentially contributes to the strength of every association, civil, military, and religious ; but unfortunately for your argument, and much to the reproach of Christians, nothing has been more wanting amongst them, from the apostolic age to our own, than union. *I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ,* are expressions of disunion, which we meet with in the earliest period of church history ; and we cannot look into the writings of any, either friend or foe to Christianity, but we find

find the one of them lamenting, and the other exulting in an immense catalogue of sectaries; and both of them thereby furnishing us with great reason to believe, that the divisions with respect to doctrine, worship, and discipline, which have ever subsisted in the church, must have greatly tended to hurt the credit of Christianity, and to alienate the minds of the Gentiles from the reception of such a various and discordant faith.

I readily grant, that there was a certain community of doctrine, an intercourse of hospitality, and a confederacy of discipline established amongst the individuals of every church; so that none could be admitted into any assembly of Christians, without undergoing a previous examination into his manner of life \*, (which shews by the bye, that every reprobate could not, as the fit seized him, or his interest induced him, become a Christian) and without protesting

\* Nonnulli præpositi sunt, qui in vitam et mores eorum, qui admittuntur, inquirant, ut non concessa facientes candidatos religionis arceant a suis conventibus. Orig. Cen. Cel. Lib. 2.



testifying in the most solemn manner, that he would neither be guilty of murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor perfidy; and it may be granted also, that those who broke this compact, were ejected by common consent from the confraternity into which they had been admitted; it may be further granted, that this confederacy extended itself to independent churches; and that those who had, for their immoralities, been excluded from Christian community in any one church, were rarely, if ever admitted to it by another; just as a member, who has been expelled any one College in an university, is generally thought unworthy of being admitted by any other: But it is not admitted, that this severity and this union of discipline could ever have induced the Pagans to forsake the gods of their country, and to expose themselves to the contemptuous hatred of their neighbours, and to all the severities of persecution exercised, with unrelenting barbarity, against the Christians.

The

The account you give of the origin and progress of episcopal jurisdiction, of the pre-eminence of the Metropolitan churches, and of the ambition of the Roman Pontiff, I believe to be in general accurate and true; and I am not in the least surpris'd at the bitterness, which now and then escapes you in treating this subject; for, to see the most benign religion that imagination can form, becoming an instrument of oppression; and the most humble one administering to the pride, the avarice, and the ambition of those, who wish'd to be considered as it's guardians, and who avowed themselves it's professors, would extort a censure from men more attached probably to church authority than yourself: Not that I think it, either a very candid, or a very useful undertaking, to be solely and industriously engaged in portraying the characters of the professors of Christianity in the worst colours; it is not candid, because "the great law of impartiality, which obliges an historian to reveal the imperfections of the uninspired teachers and believers of the gospel," obliges him

him also not to conceal, or to pass over with niggard and reluctant mention, the illustrious virtues of those, who gave up fortune and fame, all their comforts, and all their hopes in this life, nay, life itself, rather than violate any one of the precepts of that gospel, which from the testimony of inspired teachers, they conceived they had good reason to believe; it is not useful, because "to a careless observer," (that is, to the generality of mankind) "*their* faults may seem "to cast a shade on the faith, which they "professed;" and may really infect the minds of the young and unlearned especially, with prejudices against a religion, upon their rational reception or rejection of which, a matter of the utmost importance may (believe me, Sir, it may, for ought you or any person else can prove to the contrary) entirely depend. It is an easy matter to amuse ourselves and others with the immoralities of priests, and the ambition of prelates, with the absurd virulence of synods and councils, with the ridiculous doctrines, which visionary enthusiasts or interested churchmen have sanctified

sanctified with the name of Christian; but a display of ingenuity, or erudition upon such subjects is much misplaced; since it excites almost in every person, an unavoidable suspicion of the purity of the source itself, from which such polluted streams have been derived. Do not mistake my meaning; I am far from wishing, that the clergy should be looked up to with a blind reverence, or their imperfections screened by the sanctity of their function, from the animadversion of the world: quite the contrary; their conduct, I am of opinion, ought to be more nicely scrutinized, and their deviation from the rectitude of the gospel, more severely censured, than that of other men; but great care should be taken, not to represent *their* vices, or *their* indiscretions, as originating in the principles of their religion. Do not mistake me; I am not here begging quarter for Christianity; or contending, that even the principles of our religion should be received with implicit faith, or that every objection to Christianity should be stifled, by a representation of the mischief it might do, if pub-



licly promulged : on the contrary, we invite, nay, we challenge you to a direct and liberal attack ; though oblique glances, and disingenuous insinuations, we are willing to avoid ; well knowing, that the character of our religion, like that of an honest man, is defended with greater difficulty against the suggestions of ridicule, and the secret malignity of pretended friends, than against positive accusations, and the avowed malice of open enemies.

In your account of the primitive church, you set forth, that “ the want of discipline  
“ and human learning, was supplied by the  
“ occasional assistance of the prophets ; who  
“ were called to that function, without  
“ distinction of age, of sex, or of natural  
“ abilities.”—That the gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts, by which some of the first Christians were enabled to co-operate with the Apostles, in the general design of preaching the gospel ; and that this gift, or rather, as Mr. Locke thinks, the gift of tongues, (by the ostentation of which, many  
of

of them were prompted to speak in their assemblies at the same time) was the occasion of some disorder in the church of Corinth, which required the interposition of the Apostle to compose, is confessed on all hands. But if you mean, that the prophets were ever the sole pastors of the faithful; or that no provision was made by the Apostles for the good government and edification of the church, except what might be accidentally derived from the occasional assistance of the prophets, you are much mistaken; and have undoubtedly forgot, what is said of Paul and Barnabas having ordained elders in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch; and of Paul's commission to Titus, whom he had left in Crete, to ordain elders in every city; and of his instructions both to him and Timothy, concerning the qualifications of those, whom they were to appoint bishops: one of which was, that a bishop should be able by sound doctrine, to exhort and to convince the gainsayer; nor is it said, that this sound doctrine was to be communicated to the bishop by prophecy, or that all persons, without distinction,

tinction, might be called to that office ; but a bishop was *to be able to teach*, not what he had learned by prophecy, but what Paul had publicly preached ; *the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*. And in every place almost, where prophets are mentioned, they are joined with Apostles and teachers, and other ministers of the gospel ; so that there is no reason for your representing them as a distinct order of men, who were by their occasional assistance to supply the want of discipline and human learning in the church. It would be taking too large a field, to inquire, whether the prophets, you speak of, were endowed with ordinary or extraordinary gifts ; whether they always spoke by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, or according to *the analogy of faith* ; whether their gift consisted in the foretelling of future events, or in the interpreting of scripture to the edification and exhortation and comfort of the church, or in both : I will content myself with observing, that he will  
 judge

judge very improperly concerning the prophets of the apostolic church, who takes his idea of their office or importance, from your description of them.

In speaking of the community of goods, which, you say, was adopted for a short time in the primitive church, you hold as inconclusive the arguments of Mosheim; who has endeavoured to prove, that it was a community, quite different from that recommended by Pythagoras or Plato; consisting principally in a common use, derived from an unbounded liberality, which induced the opulent to share their riches with their indigent brethren; there have been others, as well as Mosheim, who have entertained this opinion; and it is not quite so indefensible, as you represent it; but whether it be reasonable or absurd, need not now be examined: it is far more necessary to take notice of an expression, which you have used, and which may be apt to mislead unwary readers into a very injurious suspicion, concerning the integrity of the Apostles. In process of  
time,



time, you observe, “ the converts, who embraced the new religion, were permitted to retain the possession of their patrimony.”

—This expression, *permitted to retain*, in ordinary acceptation, implies an antecedent obligation to part with: now, Sir, I have not the shadow of a doubt in affirming, that we have no account in scripture of any such obligation being imposed upon the converts to Christianity, either by Christ himself, or by his Apostles, or by any other authority: nay, in the very place, where this community of goods is treated of, there is an express proof, (I know not how your impartiality has happened to overlook it) to the contrary. When Peter was about to inflict an exemplary punishment upon Ananias (not for keeping back a part of the price, as some men are fond of representing it, but) for his lying and hypocrisy, in offering a part of the price of his land, as the whole of it; he said to him, *whilst it remained (unfold) was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?* From this account it is evident, that Ananias was under no obligation

tion to part with his patrimony; and after he had parted with it, the price was in his own power; the Apostle would have *permitted him to retain* the whole of it, if he had thought fit; though he would not permit his prevarication to go unpunished.

You have remarked, that “ the feasts of “ love, the agapæ, as they were called, constituted a very pleasing and essential part “ of public worship.”—Lest any one should from hence be led to suspect, that these feasts of love, this pleasing part of the public worship of the primitive church, resembled the unhallowed meetings of some impure sectaries of our own times, I will take the liberty to add to your account, a short explication of the nature of these agapæ. Tertulian, in the 39th chapter of his Apology, has done it to my hands. The nature of our supper, says he, is indicated by it’s name; it is called by a word, which, in the Greek language, signifies Love. We are not anxious about the expence of the entertainment; since we look upon that as gain, which is expended

expended with a pious purpose, in the relief and refreshment of all our indigent.—The occasion of our entertainment being so honourable, you may judge of the manner of it's being conducted; it consists in the discharge of religious duties; it admits nothing vile, nothing immodest. Before we sit down, prayer is made to God. The hungry eat as much as they desire, and every one drinks as much as can be useful to sober men. We so feast, as men, who have their minds impressed with the idea of spending the night in the worship of God; we so converse, as men, who are conscious that the Lord heareth them, &c. Perhaps you may object to this testimony, in favour of the innocence of Christian meetings, as liable to partiality, because it is the testimony of a Christian; and you may, perhaps, be able to pick out from the writings of this Christian, something that looks like a contradiction of this account: however, I will rest the matter upon this testimony for the present; forbearing to quote any other Christian writer upon the subject, as I shall in a future letter, produce  
you

you a testimony, superior to every objection. You speak too of the agapæ, as an essential part of the public worship; this is not according to your usual accuracy; for, had they been essential, the edict of an heathen magistrate would not have been able to put a stop to them; yet Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, expressly says, that the Christians left them off, upon his publishing an edict prohibiting assemblies; and we know, that in the council of Carthage, in the fourth century, on account of the abuses which attended them, they began to be interdicted, and ceased almost universally in the fifth.

I have but two observations to make upon what you have advanced, concerning the severity of ecclesiastical penance; the first is, that even you yourself do not deduce it's institution from the scripture; but from the power, which every voluntary society has over it's own members; and therefore, however extravagant, or however absurd; however opposite to the attributes of a commiserating God, or the feelings of a fallible man,



man, it may be thought ; or upon whatever trivial occasion, such as that, you mention, of calumniating a bishop, a presbyter, or even a deacon, it may have been inflicted ; Christ and his Apostles are not answerable for it. The other is, that it was of all possible expedients, the least fitted to accomplish the end, for which you think it was introduced, the propagation of Christianity. The sight of a penitent humbled by a public confession, emaciated by fasting, clothed in sackcloth, prostrated at the door of the assembly, and imploring for years together the pardon of his offences, and a re-admission into the bosom of the church, was a much more likely means of deterring the Pagans from Christian community, than the pious liberality you mention, was of alluring them into it. This pious liberality, Sir, would exhaust, even your elegant powers of description, before you could exhibit it in the amiable manner it deserves ; it is derived from the *new commandment of loving one another* ; and it has ever been the distinguishing characteristic of Christians, as opposed to every other

other denomination of men, Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans. In the times of the Apostles, and in the first ages of the church, it shewed itself in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and the persecuted, the infirm and the unfortunate; as soon as the church was permitted to have permanent possessions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itself in the erection of hospitals of every kind; institutions these, of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus; and for even one example of which, you will, I believe, in vain explore the boasted annals of pagan Rome. Indeed, Sir, you will think too injuriously of this liberality, if you look upon it's origin as superstitious; or upon it's application as an artifice of the priesthood, to seduce the indigent into the bosom of the church; it was the pure and uncorrupted fruit of genuine Christianity.

You are much *surprised*, and not a little *concerned*, that Tacitus and the younger Pliny,

Pliny, have spoken so slightly of the Christian system; and that Seneca and the elder Pliny, have not vouchsafed to mention it at all. This difficulty seems to have struck others, as well as yourself; and I might refer you to the conclusion of the second volume of Dr. Lardner's Collection of Ancient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of the Christian Religion, for full satisfaction in this point; but perhaps an observation or two, may be sufficient to diminish your surprise.

Obscure sectaries of upright morals, when they separate themselves from the religion of their country, do not speedily acquire the attention of men of letters. The historians are apprehensive of depreciating the dignity of their learned labour, and contaminating their splendid narration of illustrious events, by mixing with it a disgusting detail of religious combinations; and the philosophers are usually too deeply engaged in abstract science, or in exploring the infinite intricacy

cacy of natural appearances, to busy themselves with what they, perhaps hastily, esteem popular superstitions. Historians and philosophers, of no mean reputation, might be mentioned, I believe, who were the contemporaries of Luther and the first reformers; and who have passed over in negligent or contemptuous silence, their daring and unpopular attempts to shake the stability of St. Peter's Chair. Opposition to the religion of a people, must become general, before it can deserve the notice of the civil magistrate; and till it does that, it will mostly be thought below the animadversion of distinguished writers. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the case in point. The first Christians, as Christ had foretold, were *bated of all men for his name's sake*: it was the name itself, not any vices adhering to the name, which Pliny punished; and they were everywhere held in exceeding contempt, till their numbers excited the apprehension of the ruling powers. The philosophers considered them as enthusiasts, and neglected them; the priests opposed them as innovators, and

calum-



calumniated them; the great overlooked them, the learned despised them, and the curious alone, who examined into the foundation of their faith, believed them. But the negligence of some half dozen of writers, (most of them however bear incidental testimony to the truth of several facts respecting Christianity) in not relating circumstantially the origin, the progress, and the pretensions of a new sect, is a very insufficient reason for questioning, either the evidence of the principles upon which it was built, or the supernatural power by which it was supported.

The Roman historians, moreover, were not only culpably incurious concerning the Christians; but unpardonably ignorant of what concerned either them, or the Jews: I say, unpardonably ignorant; because the means of information were within their reach; the writings of Moses were every where to be had in Greek; and the works of Josephus were published, before Tacitus wrote his history; and yet, even Tacitus  
has

has fallen into great absurdity, and self contradiction in his account of the Jews; and though Tertullian's zeal carried him much too far, when he called him *Mendaciorum loquacissimus*, yet one cannot help regretting the little pains he took to acquire proper information upon that subject. He derives the name of the Jews by a forced interpolation from mount Ida in Crete \*; and he represents them as abhorring all kinds of images in public worship, and yet accuses them of having placed the image of an As in the holy of holies; and presently after he tells us, that Pompey, when he profaned the temple, found the sanctuary entirely empty. Similar inaccuracies might be noticed in Plutarch and other writers, who have spoken of the Jews; and you yourself have referred to an obscure passage in Suetonius, as offering a proof how strangely the Jews and Christians of Rome were confounded with each other. Why then should we think it remarkable,

\* Inclytum in Creta Idam montem, accolas Idæos aucto in barbarum cognomento Judæos vocitari. Tac. Hist. L. 5. sub Init.

remarkable, that a few celebrated writers, who looked upon the Christians as an obscure sect of the Jews, and upon the Jews as a barbarous and detested people, whose history was not worth the perusal; and who were moreover engaged in the relation of the great events, which either occasioned or accompanied the ruin of their eternal empire; why should we be surprised, that men occupied in such interesting subjects, and influenced by such inveterate prejudices, should have left us but short and imperfect descriptions of the Christian system?

“ But how shall we excuse, you say, the  
 “ supine inattention of the pagan and phi-  
 “ losophic world, to those evidences, which  
 “ were presented by the hand of omnipo-  
 “ tence, not to their reason, but to their  
 “ senses?”—“ The laws of nature were per-  
 “ petually suspended, for the benefit of the  
 “ church: but the sages of Greece and Rome  
 “ turned aside from the awful spectacle.”—  
 To their shame be it spoken, that they did  
 so—“ and pursuing the ordinary occupa-  
 “ tions

“ tions of life and study, appeared unconsci-  
 “ ous of any alterations in the moral or phy-  
 “ sical government of the world.”—To this  
 objection, I answer in the first place, that  
 we have no reason to believe, that miracles  
 were performed; as often as philosophers  
 deigned to give their attention to them; or  
 that, at the period of time you allude to,  
 the laws of nature were *perpetually* suspend-  
 ed, for the benefit of the church. It may  
 be, that not one of the few heathen writers,  
 whose books have escaped the ravages of  
 time, was ever present, when a miracle was  
 wrought; but will it follow, because Pliny,  
 or Plutarch, or Galen, or Seneca, or Sueton-  
 ius, or Tacitus, had never seen a miracle,  
 that no miracles were ever performed? They  
 indeed were learned, and observant men;  
 and it may be a matter of surprise to us, that  
 miracles so celebrated, as the friends of  
 Christianity suppose the Christian ones to  
 have been, should never have been menti-  
 oned by them though they had not seen  
 them; and had an Adrian or a Vespasian  
 been the authors of but a thousandth part



of the miracles, you have ascribed to the primitive church, more than one probably of these very historians, philosophers as they were, would have adorned his history with the narration of them : for though they turned aside from the awful spectacle of the miracles of a poor despised Apostle—yet they beheld with exulting complacency, and have related with unsuspecting credulity, the ostentatious tricks of a Roman Emperor. It was not for want of faith in miraculous events, that these Sages neglected the Christian miracles, but for want of candour, and impartial examination.

I answer in the second place, that in the Acts of the Apostles, we have an account of a great number of Pagans of every condition of life, who were so far from being inattentive to the evidences, which were presented by the hand of omnipotence to their senses, that they contemplated them with reverence and wonder ; and forsaking the religion of their ancestors, and all the flattering hopes of worldly profit, reputation, and tranquillity,

tranquillity, adhered with astonishing resolution to the profession of Christianity. From the conclusion of the Acts, till the time in which some of the Sages you mention flourished, is a very obscure part of church history; yet we are certain, that many of the Pagan, and we have some reason to believe, that not a few of the Philosophic world, during that period, did not turn aside from the awful spectacle of miracles, but saw and believed; and that a few others should be found, who probably had never seen, and therefore would not believe, is surely no very extraordinary circumstance. Why should we not answer to objections, such as these, with the boldness of St. Jerome; and bid Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, and their followers, learn the illustrious characters of men, who founded, built up, and adorned the Christian church \*? why should we not

H 2

tell

\* Discant Celsus, Porphyrius, Julianus, rabidi adversus Christum canes, discant eorum sectatores, qui putant Ecclesiam nullos Philosophos et eloquentes, nullos habuisse Doctores; quanti et quales viri eam fundaverint, extruxerint, ornaverintque;

tell them, with Arnobius, of the orators, the grammarians, the rhetoricians, the lawyers, the physicians, the philosophers, " who appeared conscious of the alterations in the " moral and physical government of the " world ;" and from that consciousness, forsook the ordinary occupations of life and study, and attached themselves to the Christian discipline \* ?

I answer in the last place, that the miracles of Christians were falsely attributed to magic ; and were for that reason thought unworthy the notice of the writers, you have referred to. Suetonius in his life of Nero, calls the Christians, Men of a new and magical superstition : † I am sensible, that you laugh at those " sagacious commentators,"

ornaverintque ; et definant fidem nostram rusticæ tantum simplicitatis arguere, suamque potius imperitiam agnoscant. Jero. Proc. Lib. de Illuf. Eccl. Scrip.

\* Arnob. Con. Gen. L. 11.

† Genus hominum, superstitionis novæ et malefice. Suet. in Nero. c. 16.

"mentators," who translate the original word by magical; and adopting the idea of Mosheim, you think it ought to be rendered mischievous or pernicious: Unquestionably it frequently has that meaning; with due deference, however, to Mosheim and yourself, I cannot help being of opinion, that in this place, as descriptive of the Christian religion, it is rightly translated magical. The Theodosian Code must be my excuse, for dissenting from such respectable authority; and in it, I conjecture, you will find good reason for being of my opinion.\* Nor ought any friend to Christianity, to be astonished or alarmed at Suetonius' applying the word Magical to the Christian religion; for the miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles, principally consisted in alleviating the distresses, by curing the obstinate diseases of human kind; and the proper meaning of magic, as understood by the ancients, is a

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higher

\* Chaldæi, ac *Magi*, et cæteri quos vulgus *maleficos* ob factorum magnitudinem appellat.—Si quis *magus* vel magicis contaminibus adfectus, qui *maleficus* vulgi consuetudine nuncupatur. 1x Cod. Theodo. Tit. xvi.



higher and more holy branch of the art of healing.\* The elder Pliny lost his life in an eruption of Vesuvius, about forty seven years after the death of Christ; some fifteen years before the death of Pliny, the Christians were persecuted at Rome for a crime, of which every person knew them innocent; but from the description, which Tacitus gives, of the low estimation they were held in at that time, (for which, however, he assigns no cause; and therefore we may reasonably conjecture it was the same, for which the Jews were every where become so odious, an opposition to polytheism) and of the extreme sufferings they underwent, we cannot be much surprised, that their name is not to be found in the works of Pliny, or of Seneca; the sect itself must, by Nero's persecution, have been almost destroyed in Rome;

\* Pliny, speaking of the origin of magic, says, *Natum primum e medicina nemo dubitat, ac specie salutari irrepsisse velut altiore sanctioremque medicinam.*—He afterwards says, that it was mixed with mathematical arts; and thus *magici* and *mathematici* are joined by Pliny, as *malefici* and *mathematici* are in the Theodosian Code. Plin. Nat. Hist. Lib. 30. c. 1.

Rome; and it would have been uncourtly, not to say unsafe, to have noticed an order of men, whose innocence an emperor had determined to traduce, in order to divert the dangerous, but deserved stream of popular censure from himself. Notwithstanding this, there is a passage in the Natural History of Pliny; which, how much soever it may have been overlooked, contains, I think, a very strong allusion to the Christians; and clearly intimates, he had heard of their miracles. In speaking concerning the origin of magic, he says,—there is also another faction of magic, derived from the Jews, Moses and Lotopea, and subsisting at present.\*—The word faction, does not ill denote the opinion the Romans entertained of the religious associations of the Christians; † and a magical faction

\* Est et alia magicee *factio*, a Mose *etiamnum* et Lotopea Judæis pendens. Plin. Nat. Hist. Lib. 30. c. 2. Edit. Hardu. Dr. Lardner and others, have made slight mention of this passage, probably from their reading in bad editions *Jamne* for *etiamnum*, a Mose et Jamne et Jotape Judæis pendens.

† Tertullian reckons the Sect of the Christians, inter licitas *factiones*. Ap. c. 38.

faction implies their pretensions, at least, to the miraculous gifts of healing; and it's descending from Moses, is according to the custom of the Romans, by which they confounded the Christians with the Jews; and it's being then subsisting, seems to have a strong reference to the rumours Pliny had negligently heard reported of the Christians.

Submitting each of these answers to your cool and candid consideration; I proceed to take notice of another difficulty in your fifteenth chapter, which some have thought one of the most important in your whole book—The silence of profane historians, concerning the preternatural darkness at the crucifixion of Christ.—You know, Sir, that several learned men are of opinion, that profane history is not silent upon this subject; I will, however, put their authority for the present quite out of the question. I will neither trouble you with the testimony of Phlegon, nor with the appeal of Tertullian to the public registers of the Romans; but

but meeting you upon your own ground, and granting you every thing you desire, I will endeavour, from a fair and candid examination of the history of this event, to suggest a doubt, at least, to your mind, whether this was “ the greatest phænomenon, to which the mortal eye has been witness, “ since the creation of the globe.”

This darkness is mentioned by three of the four Evangelists; St. Matthew thus expresses himself, — *now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour*; St. Mark says, — *and when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour*; St. Luke, — *and it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened*. The three Evangelists agree, that there was darkness; — and they agree in the extent of the darkness: for it is the same expression in the original, which our translators have rendered *earth* in Luke, and *land* in the two other accounts; and they agree in the duration of the



the darkness, it lasted three hours:—Luke adds a particular circumstance, *that the sun was darkened*. I do not know, whether this event be any where else mentioned in scripture, so that our inquiry can neither be extensive nor difficult.

In philosophical propriety of speech, darkness consists in the total absence of light, and admits of no degrees; however, in the more common acceptation of the word, there are degrees of darkness, as well as of light; and as the Evangelists have said nothing, by which the particular degree of darkness can be determined; we have as much reason to suppose it was slight, as you have that it was excessive; but if it was slight, though it had extended itself over the surface of the whole globe, the difficulty of it's not being recorded by Pliny or Seneca vanishes at once\*. Do you not perceive, Sir, upon what

\* The Author of L'Evangile de la Raïson, is mistaken in saying, that the Evangelists speak of a *thick darkness*; and that mistake has led him into another, into a disbelief of the event, because it has not been mentioned by the writers of the times

what a slender foundation this mighty objection is grounded; when we have only to put you upon proving, that the darkness at the crucifixion was of so unusual a nature, as to have excited the particular attention of all mankind, or even of those who were witnesses to it? But I do not mean to deal so logically with you; rather give me leave to spare you the trouble of your proof, by proving, or shewing the probability at least, of the direct contrary. There is a circumstance mentioned by St. John, which seems to indicate, that the darkness was not so excessive, as is generally supposed; for it is probable, that during the continuance of the darkness, Jesus spoke both to his mother, and to his beloved disciple, whom he *saw* from the cross; they were near the cross; but the soldiers which surrounded it, must have kept them at too great a distance, for  
Jesus

—ses historiens (the Evangelists) ont le front de nous dire, qu' a sa mort la terre a ete couverte d'epaisses tenebres en plein midi et en pleine lune; comme si tous les ecrivains de ce tems-la n' auroient pas remarque un si etrange miracle! L'Evan. de la Raif. P. 99.

Jesus to have *seen* them and *known* them, had the darkness at the crucifixion been excessive, like the præternatural darkness, which God brought upon the land of Egypt; for it is expressly said, that during the continuance of that darkness, *they saw not one another*. The expression in St. Luke, *the sun was darkened*, tends rather to confirm, than to overthrow this reasoning. I am sensible, this expression is generally thought equivalent to another—the sun was eclipsed;—but the Bible is open to us all; and there can be no presumption, in endeavouring to investigate the meaning of scripture for ourselves. Luckily for the present argumentation, the very phrase of the sun's being darkened, occurs, in so many words, in one other place (and in only one) of the new testament; and from that place, you may possibly see reason to imagine, that the darkness might not, perhaps, have been so intense, as to deserve the particular notice of the Roman naturalists:—*And he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the*

*the sun was darkened* \*, and the air, by reason of the smoke of the pit. If we should say, that the sun at the crucifixion was obnubilated, and darkened by the intervention of clouds, as it is here represented to be by the intervention of a smoke, like the smoke of a furnace, I do not see what you could object to our account; but such a phænomenon has, surely, no right to be esteemed the greatest that mortal eye has ever beheld. I may be mistaken in this interpretation; but I have no design to misrepresent the fact, in order to get rid of a difficulty; the darkness may have been as intense, as many commentators have supposed it; but neither they, nor you can prove it was so; and I am surely under no necessity, upon this occasion, of granting you, out of deference to any commentator, what you can neither prove nor render probable.

But you still, perhaps, may think, that the darkness, by it's extent, made up for this deficiency

\* —και ἐσκοτίσθη ὁ ἥλιος. Αποκ. 9. 2.



deficiency in point of intenseness. The original word, expressive of it's extent, is sometimes interpreted by the whole earth; more frequently in the new testament, of any little portion of the earth; for we read of the land of Judah, of the land of Israel, of the land of Zabulon, and of the land of Nephthalim; and it may very properly, I conceive, be translated in the place in question by *Region*. But why should all the world take notice of a darkness, which extended itself for a few miles about Jerusalem, and lasted but three hours? The Italians, especially, had no reason to remark the event as singular; since they were accustomed at that time, as they are at present, to see the *neighbouring regions* so darkened for days together by the eruptions of *Ætna* and *Vesuvius*, that no man could know his neighbour.\* We learn

\* — nos autem tenebras cogitemus tantas, quantæ quondam eruptione *Etnæorum ignium finitimas regiones obscuravisse* dicuntur, ut per biduum nemo hominem homo agnosceret. Cic. de Nat. Deo. l. 2. And Pliny, in describing the eruption of *Vesuvius*, which suffocated his uncle, says,--  
Dies alibi, illic nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiorque.

learn from the scripture account, that an earthquake accompanied this darkness; and a dark clouded sky, I apprehend, very frequently precedes an earthquake; but it's extent is not great, nor is it's intenseness excessive, nor is the phænomenon itself so unusual, as not commonly to pass unnoticed in ages of science and history. I fear, I may be liable to misrepresentation in this place; but I beg it may be observed, that however slight in degree, or however confined in extent the darkness at the crucifixion may have been; I am of opinion, that the power of God was as supernaturally exerted in it's production, and in that of the earthquake which accompanied it, as in the opening of the graves, and the resurrection of the saints, which followed the resurrection of Christ.

In another place, you seem not to believe  
 “ that Pontius Pilate informed the Emperor  
 “ of the unjust sentence of death, which he  
 “ had pronounced against an innocent per-  
 “ son :” And the same reason, which made  
 him

him silent as to the death, ought, one would suppose, to have made him silent as to the miraculous events, which accompanied it : and if Pilate in his dispatches to the Emperor, transmitted no account of the darkness (how great soever you suppose it to have been) which happened in a distant province ; I cannot apprehend, that the report of it could have ever gained such credit at Rome, as to induce either Pliny or Seneca to mention it as an authentic fact.

I am, Sir, &c.

LET-

## LETTER SIXTH.

S I R,

I Mean not to detain you long with my remarks upon your sixteenth Chapter; for in a short apology for Christianity, it cannot be expected, that I should apologize at length, for the indiscretions of the first Christians. Nor have I any disposition to reap a malicious pleasure, from exaggerating, what you have had so much good-natured pleasure in extenuating, the truculent barbarity of their Roman persecutors.

M. de Voltaire has embraced every opportunity, of contrasting the persecuting temper of the Christians with the mild tolerance of the ancient heathens; and I never read a page of his upon this subject, without thinking Christianity materially, if not intentionally, obliged to him, for his endeavour

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to depress the lofty spirit of religious bigotry. I may with justice pay the same compliment to you; and I do it with sincerity; heartily wishing, that in the prosecution of your work, you may render every species of intolerance universally detestable. There is no reason, why you should abate the asperity of your invective; since no one can suspect you of a design to traduce Christianity, under the guise of a zeal against persecution; or if any one should be so simple, he need but open the gospel to be convinced, that such a scheme is too palpably absurd, to have ever entered the head of any sensible and impartial man.

I wish for the credit of human nature, that I could find reason to agree with you, in what you have said of the “universal toleration of Polytheism; of the mild indifference of antiquity; of the Roman princes beholding, without concern, a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway.” But there are some passages in the Roman History, which make me hesitate

tate at least in this point ; and almost induce me to believe, that the Romans were exceedingly jealous of all foreign religions, whether they were accompanied with immoral manners or not.

It was the Roman custom indeed, to invite the tutelary gods of the nations, which they intended to subdue, to abandon their charge ; and to promise them the same, or even a more august worship in the city of Rome \* ; and their triumphs were graced as much with the exhibition of their captive gods, as with the less humane one of their captive kings†. But this custom, though it filled the city with hundreds of gods of every country, denomination, and quality, cannot be brought as proof of Roman toleration ; it may indi-

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cate

\* In oppugnationibus, ante omnia solitum a Romanis Sacerdotibus evocari Deum, cujus in tutela id oppidum esset ; promittique illi eundem, aut ampliorem apud Romanos cultum. Plin. Nat. Hist. L. 38. C. iv.

† Roma triumphantis quotiens Ducis inclita currum  
Plausibus excepit, totiens altaria Divûm

Addidit, spoliis sibi met nova numina fecit. Pruden.

cate the excess of their vanity, the extent of their superstition, or the refinement of their policy; but it can never shew, that the religion of individuals, when it differed from public wisdom, was either connived at as a matter of indifference, or tolerated as an inalienable right of human nature.

Upon another occasion, you, Sir, have referred to Livy, as relating the introduction and suppression of the rights of Bacchus; and in that very place we find him confessing, that the prohibiting all foreign religions, and the abolishing every mode of sacrifice which differed from the Roman mode, was a business frequently entrusted by their ancestors to the care of the proper magistrates; and he gives this reason for the procedure, That nothing could contribute more effectually to the ruin of religion, than the sacrificing after an external rite, and not after the manner instituted by their fathers\*.

Not

\* Quoties hoc patrum avorumque ætate negotium est magistratibus datum, ut sacra externa fieri vetarent? sacrificulos

Not thirty years before this event the Prætor, in conformity to a decree of the senate, had issued an edict—that no one should presume to sacrifice in any public place after a new or foreign manner\*. And in a still more early period, the Ædiles had been commanded to take care, that no gods were worshipped, except the Roman gods; and that the Roman gods were worshipped after no manner, but the established manner of the country†.

But

ficulos vatesque foro, circo, urbe prohiberent? *vaticinos libros conquirerent comburerentque?* omnem disciplinam sacrificandi, præterquam more Romano, abolerent? Judicabant enim prudentissimi viri omnis divini humanique juris, nihil æque dissolvendæ religionis esse, quam ubi non patrio, sed externo ritu sacrificaretur. Liv. L. xxxix. C. 16.

\* Ut quicumque *libros vaticinos precationesve*, aut artem sacrificandi conscriptam haberet, eos libros omnes litterasque ad se ante Kalendas Apriles deferret: neu quis in publico sacrove loco, novo aut externo ritu sacrificaret. Liv. L. xxv. C. i.

† Datum inde negotium ædilibus, ut animadverterent, ne qui, nisi Romani Dii, neu quo alio more, quam patrio coleantur. Liv. L. iv. C. 30.



But to come nearer to the times, of which you are writing. In Dion Cassius you may meet with a great courtier, one of the interior cabinet, and a polished statesman, in a set speech, upon the most momentous subject, expressing himself to the Emperor, in a manner agreeable enough to the practice of antiquity, but utterly inconsistent with the most remote idea of religious toleration. The speech alluded to, contains, I confess it, nothing more than the advice of an individual; but it ought to be remembered, that *that* individual was Mæcenas, that the advice was given to Augustus, and that the occasion of giving it, was no less important than the settling the form of the Roman government. He recommends it to Cæsar, to worship the gods himself, according to the established form; and *force* all others to do the same; and to *bate* and to *punish* all those, who should attempt to introduce foreign religions \* ; nay, he bids

\* Ταυτα τε ουτω φραττε, και προσει το μεν θειον παντα παντως αυτος τε σεβου, κατα τα πατρια, και τους αλλους τιμην αναγκαζε· τους δε δη ξενηζοντας τι περι αυτου και μιση και κολαζε.  
 † Dion. Caf. L. 52.

bids him in the same place, have an eye upon the philosophers also; so that free thinking, free speaking at least, upon religious matters, was not quite so safe under the gentle sway of the Roman princes; as, thank God, it is under the much more gentle government of our own.

In the Edict of Toleration published by Galerius after six years unremitted persecution of the Christians, we perceive his motive for persecution, to have been the same with that, which had influenced the conduct of the more ancient Romans, an abhorrence of all innovations in religion. You have favoured us with the translation of this edict, in which he says—"we were particularly desirous of reclaiming into the way of reason and nature," *ad bonas mentes* (a good pretence this for a Polytheistic persecutor) "the deluded Christians, who had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by their fathers"—this is the precise language of Livy, describing a persecution of a foreign religion

religion three hundred years before, *turba erat nec sacrificantium nec precantium Deos patrio more.* And the very expedient of forcing the Christians to deliver up their religious books, which was practised in this persecution, and which Mosheim attributes to the advice of Hierocles, and you to that of the philosophers of those times, seems clear to me from the places in Livy, before quoted, to have been nothing but an old piece of state policy, to which the Romans had recourse, as often as they apprehended their established religion to be in any danger.

In the preamble of the letter of toleration, which the emperor Maximin reluctantly wrote to Sabinus about a year after the publication of Galerius' Edict, there is a plain avowal of the reasons, which induced Galerius and Diocletian to commence their persecution; they had seen the temples of the gods forsaken, and were determined by the

the severity of punishment to reclaim men to their worship \*.

In short, the system recommended by Mæcenas, of forcing every person to be of the emperor's religion, and of hating and punishing every innovator, contained no new doctrine; it was correspondent to the practice of the Roman senate, in the most illustrious times of the republic; and seems to have been generally adopted by the emperors, in their treatment of Christians, whilst they themselves were Pagans; and in their treatment of Pagans, after they themselves became Christians; and if any one should be willing to derive those laws against Heretics (which are so abhorrent from the mild spirit of the gospel, and so reproachful to the Roman Code) from the blind adherence of the Christian emperors to the intolerant

\* Συνειδὸν σχεδὸν ἀπαντὰς ἀνθρώπους, κατὰλειψείσης τῆς τῶν θεῶν θρησκείας, τῷ εἶναι τῶν χριστιανῶν ἐαυτοὺς συμμεμιχότας. Ὁρθῶς διατεταχέναι πάντας ἀνθρώπους τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν τῶν ἀθανάτων ἀναχωρησάντας, πρὸ βίβῃ κολάσει καὶ τιμωρίᾳ εἰς τὴν θρησκείαν τῶν θεῶν ἀνακληθῆναι. Euseb. Lib. ix. C. 4.



tolerant policy of their Pagan predecessors, something, I think, might be produced in support of his conjecture,

But I am sorry to have said so much upon such a subject.—In endeavouring to palliate the severity of the Romans towards the Christians, you have remarked, “ it was in vain, that the oppressed believer asserted “ the inalienable rights of conscience, and “ private judgment.” “ Though his situation might excite the pity, his arguments “ could never reach the understanding, either of the philosophic, or of the believing part of the Pagan world.” How is this, Sir? are the arguments for liberty of conscience, so exceedingly inconclusive, that you think them incapable of reaching the understanding, even of philosophers? A captious adversary would embrace with avidity, the opportunity this passage affords him, of blotting your character with the odious stain of being a persecutor; a stain, which no learning can wipe out, which no genius or ability can render amiable. I am far from  
entertaining

entertaining such an opinion of your principles ; but this conclusion seems fairly deducible from what you have said,—that the minds of the Pagans, were so pre-occupied with the notions of forcing, and hating, and punishing those, who differed from them in religion, that arguments for the inalienable rights of conscience, which would have convinced yourself and every philosopher in Europe, and staggered the resolution of an inquisitor, were incapable of reaching their understandings, or making any impression on their hearts ; and you might, perhaps, have spared yourself some perplexity, in the investigation of the motives, which induced the Roman emperors to persecute, and the Roman people to hate the Christians, if you had not overlooked the true one, and adopted with too great facility, the erroneous idea of the extreme tolerance of pagan Rome.

The Christians, you observe, were accused of atheism :—and it must be owned, that they were the greatest of all atheists, in the opinion

opinion of the polytheists; for, instead of Hesiod's thirty thousand gods, they could not be brought to acknowledge above one; and even that one they refused, at the hazard of their lives, to blaspheme with the appellation of Jupiter. But is it not somewhat singular, that the pretensions of the Christians to a constant intercourse with superior beings, in the working of miracles, should have been a principal cause of converting to their faith, those who branded them with the imputation of atheism?

They were accused too, of forming dangerous conspiracies against the state:—This accusation, you own, was as unjust as the preceding; but there seems to have been a peculiar hardship in the situation of the Christians; since the very same men, who thought them dangerous to the state, on account of their conspiracies; condemned them, as you have observed, for not interfering in it's concerns; for their criminal disregard to the business of war and government;

ment; and for their entertaining doctrines, which were supposed "to prohibit them "from assuming the character of soldiers, "of magistrates, and of princes:" Men such as these, would have made but poor conspirators.

They were accused, lastly, of the most horrid crimes:—This accusation, it is confessed, was mere calumny; yet, as calumny is generally more extensive in it's influence, than truth, perhaps this calumny might be more powerful in stopping the progress of Christianity, than the virtues of the Christians were in promoting it: and in truth, Origen observes, that the Christians, on account of the crimes which were maliciously laid to their charge, were held in such abhorrence, that no one would so much as speak to them. It may be worth while to remark from him, that the Jews, in the very beginning of Christianity, were the authors of all those calumnies, which Celsus afterwards took such great delight in urging against the Christians, and which



which you have mentioned with such great precision.\*

It is no improbable supposition, that the clandestine manner, in which the persecuting spirit of the Jews and Gentiles, obliged the Christians to celebrate their Eucharist, together with the expressions of eating the body, and drinking the blood of Christ, which were used in it's institution, and the custom of imparting a kiss of charity to each other, and of calling each other by the appellations of brother and sister,† gave occasions to their enemies

\* Videtur mihi fecisse idem Celsus, quod Judæi, qui sub Christianismi initium errorem sparsere, quasi ejus sectæ homines mactati pueri vescerentur carnibus; et quod, quoties eis libeat operam dare occultis libidinibus, extincto lumine constupret, quam quisque nactus fuerit. Quæ falsa et iniqua opinio dudum valde multos a religione nostrâ alienos tenuit; persuasos, quod tales sint Christiani; et ad hoc temporis nonnullos fallit; quia ea de causa Christianos averfantur, ut nec simplex colloquium cum eis habere velint. Orig. con. Cel. Lib. vi.

† The Romans used these expressions in so impure a sense, that Martial calls them, Nomina nequiora. Lib. II. Epig. iv.

enemies to invent, and induced careless observers to believe, all the odious things which were said against the Christians.

You have displayed at length, in expressive diction, the accusations of the enemies of Christianity; and you have told us, of the imprudent defence, by which the Christians vindicated the purity of their morals; and you have huddled up in a short note, (which many a reader will never see) the testimony of Pliny to their innocence; permit me to do the Christians a little justice, by producing in their cause the whole truth.

Between seventy and eighty years after the death of Christ, Pliny had occasion to consult the emperor Trajan, concerning the manner, in which he should treat the Christians; it seems as if there had been judicial proceedings against them, though Pliny had never happened to attend any of them. He knew, indeed, that men were to be punished for being Christians, or he would not, as a sensible magistrate, have received the accusations

fations of legal, much less of illegal, anonymous informers against them; nor would he, before he wrote to the emperor, have put to death those, whom his threats could not hinder from persevering in their confession, that they were Christians. His harsh manner of proceeding "in an office the most repugnant to his humanity," had made many apostatize from their profession; persons of this complexion, were well fitted to inform him of every thing they knew concerning the Christians; accordingly, he examined them; but not one of them accused the Christians of any other crime, than of praying to Christ, as to some God, and of binding themselves by an oath, not to be guilty of any wickedness. Not contented with this information, he put two maid servants, which were called ministers, to the torture; but even the rack, could not extort from the imbecility of the sex, a confession of any crime, any account different from that which the apostates had voluntary given; not a word do we find of their feasting upon murdered infants, or of their mixing in incestu-

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ous commerce. After all his pains, Pliny pronounced the meal of the Christians to be *promiscuous* and *innocent*: persons of both sexes, of all ages, and of every condition, assembled promiscuously together: there was nothing for chastity to blush at, or for humanity to shudder at, in these meetings; there was no secret initiation of proselytes by abhorred rites; but they eat a promiscuous meal in Christian charity, and with the most perfect innocence.\*

Whatever faults then, the Christians may have been guilty of in after times; though you could produce to us a thousand ambitious prelates of Carthage, or sensual ones of Antioch, and blot ten thousand pages with

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the

\* — affirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ, vel erroris, quod essent soliti statò die ante lucem convenire: carmenque Christo, quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem: seque sacramento non *in seculum* aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent: quibus peractis, morem sibi discedendi fuisse, rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum, *promiscuum* tamen, et *innocuum*. Plin. Epist. xcvii. Lib. x.



the impurities of the Christian clergy; yet at this period, whilst the memory of Christ and his Apostles, was fresh in their minds; or, in the more emphatic language of Jerome, "whilst the blood of our Lord was warm, "and recent faith was fervent in the believers;" we have the greatest reason to conclude, that they were eminently distinguished for the probity and the purity of their lives. Had there been but a shadow of a crime in their assemblies, it must have been detected by the industrious search of the intelligent Pliny; and it is a matter of real surprise, that no one of the apostates, thought of paying court to the governor, by a false testimony; especially, as the apostacy seems to have been exceeding general; since the temples, which had been almost deserted, began again to be frequented; and the victims, for which a little time before, scarce a purchaser was to be found, began again every where to be bought up. This, Sir, is a valuable testimony in our favour; it is not that of a declaiming apologist, of a deluding priest,

priest, or of a deluded martyr, of an orthodox bishop, or of any “ of the most pious of “ men” the Christians; but it is that of a Roman magistrate, philosopher, and lawyer; who cannot be supposed to have wanted inclination to detect the immoralities, or the conspiracies of the Christians; since, in his treatment of them, he had stretched the authority of his office, and violated alike the laws of his country, and of humanity.

With this testimony, I will conclude my remarks; for I have no disposition to blacken the character you have given of Nero; or to lessen the humanity of the Roman magistrates; or to magnify the number of Christians, or of martyrs; or to undertake the defence of a few fanatics, who by their injudicious zeal, brought ruin upon themselves, and disgrace upon their profession. I may not probably have convinced you, that you are wrong in any thing, which you have advanced; or that the authors you have quoted, will not support you in the infer-

ences, you have drawn from their works ; or that Christianity ought to be distinguished from it's corruptions ; yet I may, perhaps, have had the good fortune to lessen, in the minds of others, some of that dislike to the Christian religion, which the perusal of your book had unhappily excited. I have touched but upon general topics ; for I should have wearied out your patience, to say nothing of my readers', or my own, had I enlarged upon every thing in which I dissent from you ; and a minute examination of your work would, moreover, have had the appearance of a captious disposition, to descend into illiberal personalities ; and might have produced a certain acrimony of sentiment or expression, which may be serviceable in supplying the place of argument, or adding a zest to a dull composition ; but has nothing to do with the investigation of truth. Sorry shall I be, if what I have written, should give the least interruption to the prosecution of the great work, in which you are engaged ; the world is now possessed of the opinion of us both,

upon

upon the subject in question ; and it may, perhaps, be proper for us both to leave it in this state ; I say not this, from any backwardness to acknowledge my mistakes, when I am convinced that I am in an error ; but to express the almost insuperable reluctance, which I feel to the bandying abusive argument, in public controversy : It is not, in good truth, a difficult task, to chastise the froward petulance of those, who mistake personal invective for reasoning, and clumsy banter for ingenuity ; but it is a dirty business at best, and should never be undertaken by a man of any temper, except when the interests of truth may suffer by his neglect. Nothing of this nature, I am sensible, is to be expected from you ; and if any thing of the kind has happened to escape myself, I hereby disclaim the intention of saying it, and heartily wish it unsaid.

Will you permit me, Sir, through this channel, (I may not, perhaps, have another so good an opportunity of doing it) to ad-



dress a few words? not to yourself, but to a set of men, who disturb all serious company with their profane declamation against Christianity; and who having picked up in their travels, or the writings of the deists, a few flimsy objections, infect with their ignorant and irreverent ridicule, the ingenuous minds of the rising generation.

GENTLE-

GENTLEMEN,

Suppose the mighty work accomplished, the cross trampled upon, Christianity every where proscribed, and the religion of nature once more become the religion of Europe; what advantage will you have derived to your country, or to yourselves, from the exchange? I know your answer—you will have freed the world from the hypocrisy of Priests, and the tyranny of Superstition.—No; you forget that Lycurgus, and Numa, and Odin, and Mango-Copac, and all the great legislators of ancient or modern story, have been of opinion, that the affairs of civil society could not well be conducted without *some* religion; you must of necessity introduce a priesthood, with, probably, as much hypocrisy; a religion, with assuredly, more superstition, than that which you now reprobate with such indecent and ill-grounded contempt. But I will tell you, from what you will have freed the world; you will have freed it from it's abhorrence of vice, and from every powerful incentive to virtue;

tue ; you will, with the religion, have brought back the depraved morality, of Paganism ; you will have robbed mankind of their firm assurance of another life ; and thereby you will have despoiled them of their patience, of their humility, of their charity, of their chastity, of all those mild and silent virtues, which (however despicable they may appear in your eyes) are the only ones, which meliorate, and sublime our nature ; which Paganism never knew, which spring from Christianity alone, which do or might constitute our comfort in this life, and without the possession of which, another life, if after all there should happen to be one, must (unless a miracle be exerted in the alteration of our disposition) be more vicious and more miserable than this is.

Perhaps you will contend, that the universal light of reason, that the truth and fitness of things, are of themselves, sufficient to exalt the nature, and regulate the manners of mankind. Shall we never have done with this groundless commendation of natural

tural law? Look into the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you will see the extent of it's influence over the Gentiles of those days; if you dislike Paul's authority, and the manners of antiquity; look into the more admired accounts of modern Voyagers; and examine it's influence over the Pagans of our own times, over the sensual inhabitants of Ottaheite, over the Canibals of New Zealand, or the remorseless Savages of America. But these men are Barbarians.—Your law of nature, notwithstanding, extends even to them:—but they have misused their reason;—they have then the more need of, and would be the more thankful for that revelation, which you, with an ignorant and fastidious self-sufficiency deem useless.—But, they might of themselves, if they thought fit, become wise and virtuous,—I answer with Cicero, *ut nihil interest, utrum nemo valeat, an nemo valere possit; sic non intelligo quid intersit, utrum nemo sit sapiens, an nemo esse possit.*

These however, you will think, are extraordinary instances; and that we ought  
not



not from these, to take our measure of the excellency of the law of nature ; but rather from the civilized states of China and Japan, or from the nations which flourished in learning and in arts, before Christianity was heard of in the world. You mean to say, that by the law of nature, which you are desirous of substituting in the room of the gospel, you do not understand those rules of conduct, which an individual, abstracted from the community, and deprived of the institution of mankind, could excogitate for himself ; but such a system of precepts, as the most enlightened men of the most enlightened ages, have recommended to our observance. Where do you find this system ? We cannot meet with it in the works of Sto bæus, or the Scythian Anacharsis, nor in those of Plato or of Cicero, nor in those of the Emperor Antonius, or the slave Epictetus ; for we are persuaded, that the most animated considerations of the *αρετων*, and the *bonestum*, of the beauty of virtue, and the fitness of things, are not able to furnish, even a Brutus himself, with permanent principles

ciples of action ; much less are they able, to purify the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart, to curb the irregularity of appetite, or restrain the impetuosity of passion in common men. If you order us to examine the works of Grotius, or Puffendorf, of Burlamaqui, or Hutcheson, for what you understand by the law of nature ; we apprehend that you are in a great error, in taking your notions of natural law, as discoverable by natural reason, from the elegant systems of it, which have been drawn up by Christian Philosophers ; since they have all laid their foundations, either tacitly or expressly, upon a principle derived from revelation, A thorough knowledge of the being and attributes of God : and even those amongst yourselves, who, rejecting Christianity still continue Theists, are indebted to revelation (whether you are either aware of, or disposed to acknowledge the debt, or not) for those sublime speculations concerning the Deity, which you have fondly attributed to the excellency of your own unassisted reason.

son. If you would know the real genius of natural law, and how far it can proceed in the investigation or enforcement of moral duties; you must consult the manners and the writings of those, who have never heard of either the Jewish or the Christian dispensation, or of those other manifestations of himself, which God vouchsafed to Adam and to the Patriarchs, before and after the flood. It would be difficult perhaps any where, to find a people entirely destitute of traditionary notices concerning a Deity, and of traditionary fears or expectations of another life; and the morals of mankind may have, perhaps, been no where quite so abandoned, as they would have been, had they been left wholly to themselves in these points: however, it is a truth, which cannot be denied, how much soever it may be lamented, that though the generality of mankind have always had some faint conceptions of God, and his providence; yet they have been always greatly inefficacious in the production of good morality, and highly de-

derogatory to his nature, amongst all the people of the earth, except the Jews and Christians; and some may perhaps be desirous of excepting the Mahometans, who derive all that is good in their *Koran* from Christianity.

The laws concerning justice, and the reparation of damages, concerning the security of property, and the performance of contracts; concerning, in short, whatever affects the well-being of civil society, have been every where understood with sufficient precision; and if you choose to style Justinian's code, a code of natural law, though you will err against propriety of speech, yet you are so far in the right, that natural reason discovered, and the depravity of human nature compelled human kind, to establish by proper sanctions the laws therein contained; and you will have moreover Carneades, no mean Philosopher, on your side; who knew of no law of nature, different from that which men had instituted for their common utility; and which was various according to the



the manners of men in different climates, and changeable with a change of times in the same. And in truth, in all countries where Paganism has been the established religion, though a philosopher may now and then have stepped beyond the paltry precept of civil jurisprudence, in his pursuit of virtue; yet the bulk of mankind have ever been contented with that scanty pittance of morality, which enabled them to escape the lash of civil punishment: I call it a scanty pittance; because a man may be intemperate, iniquitous, impious, a thousand ways a profligate and a villain, and yet elude the cognizance, and avoid the punishment of civil laws.

I am sensible, you will be ready to say, what is all this to the purpose? though the bulk of mankind may never be able to investigate the laws of natural religion, nor disposed to reverence their sanctions when investigated by others, nor solicitous about any other standard of moral rectitude, than civil legislation; yet the inconveniences  
which

which may attend the extirpation of Christianity, can be no proof of it's truth.—I have not produced them, as a proof of it's truth; but they are a strong and conclusive proof, if not of it's truth, at least of it's utility; and the consideration of it's utility, may be a motive to yourselves for examining, whether it may not chance to be true; and it ought to be a reason with every good citizen, and with every man of sound judgment, to keep his opinions to himself, if from any particular circumstances in his studies or in his education, he should have the misfortune to think that it is not true. If you can discover to the rising generation, a better religion than the Christian, one that will more effectually animate their hopes, and subdue their passions, make them better men or better members of society, we importune you to publish it for their advantage; but till you can do that, we beg of you, not to give the reins to their passions, by instilling into their unsuspicious minds your pernicious prejudices: even now, men scruple not, by their lawless lust, to ruin the repose of private families,

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and to fix a stain of infamy upon the noblest : even now, they hesitate not, in lifting up a murderous arm against the life of their friend, or against their own, as often as the fever of intemperance, stimulates their resentment ; or the satiety of an useless life excites their despondency : even now, whilst we are persuaded of a resurrection from the dead, and of a *judgment to come*, we find it difficult enough to resist the sollicitations of sense, and to escape unspotted from the licentious manners of the world : But what will become of our virtue, what of the consequent peace and happiness of society, if you persuade us, that there are no such things ? in two words,—you may ruin yourselves by your attempt, and you will certainly ruin your country by your success. ∴

But the consideration of the inutility of your design, is not the only one, which should induce you to abandon it ; the argument *a tuto* ought to be warily managed, or it may tend to the silencing our opposition to

to any system of superstition, which has had the good fortune to be sanctified by public authority; it is, indeed, liable to no objection in the present case; we do not, however, wholly rely upon it's cogency. It is not contended, that Christianity is to be received, merely because it is useful; but because it is true. This you deny, and think your objections well grounded; we conceive them originating in your vanity, your immorality, or your misapprehension. There are many worthless doctrines, many superstitious observances, which the fraud or folly of mankind have every where annexed to Christianity, (especially in the church of Rome) as essential parts of it; if you take these sorry appendages to Christianity, for Christianity itself as preached by Christ, and by the Apostles; if you confound the Roman, with the Christian religion, you quite misapprehend it's nature; and are in a state similar to that of men, mentioned by Plutarch, in his treatise of superstition; who flying from superstition, leapt over religion, and sunk into

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downright Atheism. \* —Christianity is not a religion very palatable to a voluptuous age; it will not conform it's precepts to the standard of fashion; it will not lessen the deformity of vice by lenient appellations; but calls keeping, whoredom; intrigue, adultery; and duelling, murder; it will not pander the lust, it will not licence the intemperance of mankind; it is a troublesome monitor to a man of pleasure; and your way of life may have made you quarrel with your religion.—As to your vanity, as a cause of your infidelity, suffer me to produce the sentiments of M. Bayle upon that head; if the description does not suit your character, you will not be offended at it; and if you  
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\* Le Papisme, says Helvetius in a Posthumous Work, n'est aux yeux d'un homme sensé qu'une pure idolatrie—nous sommes étonnés de l'absurdité de la religion païenne. Celle de la religion Papiste étonnera bien d'avantage un jour la postérité.—We trust, that day is not at a great distance, and Deism will then be buried in the ruins of the church of Rome; for the taking the superstition, the avarice, the ambition, the intolerance of Antichristianism for Christianity, has been the great error, upon which infidelity has built it's system, both at home and abroad.

are offended with it's freedom, it will do you good. " This inclines me to believe, that " Libertines, like Des-Barreaux, are not " greatly persuaded of the truth of what " they say. They have made no deep examination ; they have learned some few objections, which they are perpetually making " a noise with ; they speak from a principle " of ostentation, and give themselves the lie " in the time of danger. — Vanity has a " greater share in their disputes, than conscience ; they imagine, that the singularity " and boldness of the opinions which they " maintain, will give them the reputation " of men of parts:—by degrees, they get a " habit of holding impious discourses ; and " if their vanity be accompanied by a voluptuous life, their progress in that road is " the swifter." \*

The main stress of your objections, rests not upon the insufficiency of the external evidence to the truth of Christianity ; for

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\* Bayle, Hist. Dict. Art. Des-Barreaux.

few of you, though you may become the future ornaments of the senate, or of the bar, have ever employed an hour in it's examination; but upon the difficulty of the doctrines, contained in the new Testament: they exceed, you say, your comprehension; and you felicitate yourselves, that you are not yet arrived at the true standard of orthodox faith,—*credo quia impossibile*. You think, it would be taking a superfluous trouble, to inquire into the nature of the external proofs, by which Christianity is established; since, in your opinion, the book itself carries with it it's own refutation. A gentleman as acute, probably, as any of you; and who once believed, perhaps, as little as any of you, has drawn a quite different conclusion from the perusal of the new Testament; his book (however exceptionable it may be thought in some particular parts) exhibits, not only a distinguished triumph of reason over prejudice, of Christianity over Deism; but it exhibits, what is infinitely more rare, the character of a man, who has had  
courage

courage and candour enough to acknowledge it. \*

But what if there should be some incomprehensible doctrines in the Christian religion; some circumstances, which in their causes, or their consequences, surpass the reach of human reason; are they to be rejected upon that account? You are, or would be thought, men of reading, and knowledge, and enlarged understandings; weigh the matter fairly; and consider whether revealed religion be not, in this respect, just upon the same footing, and with every other object of your contemplation. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration itself, though you get over it's first principles, and learn to digest the idea of a point without parts, a line without breadth, and a surface without thickness; yet you will find yourselves at a loss to comprehend the perpetual approximation of lines, which can never meet;

\* See A View of the Internal Evidence, &c. by Soame Jenyns.



meet ; the doctrine of incommensurables, and of an infinity of infinites, each infinitely greater, or infinitely less, not only than any finite quantity, but than each other. In physics, you cannot comprehend the primary cause of any thing ; not of the light, by which you see ; nor of the elasticity of the air, by which you hear ; nor of the fire, by which you are warmed. In physiology, you cannot tell, what first gave motion to the heart ; nor what continues it ; nor why it's motion is less voluntary, than that of the lungs ; nor why you are able to move your arm, to the right or left, by a simple volition : you cannot explain the cause of animal heat ; nor comprehend the principle, by which your body was at first formed, nor by which it is sustained, nor by which it will be reduced to earth. In natural religion, you cannot comprehend the eternity or omnipresence of the Deity ; nor easily understand, how his prescience can be consistent with your freedom, or his immutability with his government of moral agents ; nor why he did not make all his creatures equally perfect ; nor why he did not create them sooner : In short,

you

you cannot look into any branch of knowledge, but you will meet with subjects above your comprehension. The fall and the redemption of human kind, are not more incomprehensible, than the creation and the conservation of the universe ; the infinite Author of the works of providence, and of nature, is equally inscrutable, equally past our finding out in them both. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the deepest inquirers into nature, have ever thought with most reverence, and spoken with most diffidence, concerning those things, which in revealed religion, may seem hard to be understood ; they have ever avoided that self-sufficiency of knowledge, which springs from ignorance, produces indifference, and ends in infidelity. Admirable to this purpose, is the reflection of the greatest mathematician of the present age, when he is combating an opinion of Newton's, by an hypothesis of his own, still less defensible than that which he opposes :—Tous les jours que je vois de ces esprits-forts, qui critique les verites de notre religion, et s'en mocquent meme avec la plus impertinente suffisance,

suffisance, je pense, chetifs mortels ! combien et combien des choses sur lesquels vous raisonnez si legerement, sont elles plus sublimes, et plus eleves, que celles sur lesquelles le grand Newton s'egare si grossierement. \*

Plato mentions a set of men, who were very ignorant, and thought themselves supremely wise ; and who rejected the argument for the being of a God, derived from the harmony and order of the universe, as old and trite ; † there have been men, it seems, in all ages, who in affecting singularity, have overlooked truth : an argument, however, is not the worse for being old ; and surely it would have been a more just mode of reasoning, if you had examined the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, weighed the old arguments from miracles, and from prophecies, before you had rejected the whole account from the difficulties you met with in it. You would laugh  
at

\* Euler.

† De Leg. Lib. x.

at an Indian, who in peeping into a history of England, and meeting with the mention of the Thames being frozen, or of a shower of hail, or of snow, should throw the book aside, as unworthy of his further notice, from his want of ability to comprehend these phænomena.

In considering the argument from miracles, you will soon be convinced, that it is possible for God to work miracles; and you will be convinced, that it is as possible for human testimony, to establish the truth of miraculous, as of physical or historical events; but before you can be convinced, that the miracles in question, are supported by such testimony, as deserves to be credited, you must inquire at what period, and by what persons, the books of the old and new Testament were composed; if you reject the account, without making this examination, you reject it from prejudice, not from reason.

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There is, however, a short method of examining this argument, which may, perhaps, make as great an impression on your minds, as any other. Three men of distinguished abilities, rose up at different times, and attacked Christianity with every objection which their malice could suggest, or their learning could devise; but neither Celsus in the second century, nor Porphyry in the third, nor the emperor Julian himself in the fourth century, ever questioned the reality of the miracles related in the Gospels. Do but you grant us, what these men (who were more likely to know the truth of the matter, than you can be) granted to their adversaries, and we will very readily let you make the most of the Magic, to which, as the last wretched shift, they were forced to attribute them. We can find you men, in our days, who from the mixture of two colourless liquors, will produce you a third as red as blood, or of any other colour you desire; & *dicto citius*, by a drop resembling water, will restore the transparency; they will make two fluids coalesce into a solid body; and

and from the mixture of liquors colder than ice, will instantly raise you a horrid explosion and a tremendous flame: these, and twenty other tricks they will perform, without having been sent with our Saviour to Egypt to learn magic; nay, with a bottle or two of oil, they will compose the undulations of a lake; and by a little art, they will restore the functions of life to a man, who has been an hour or two under water, or a day or two buried in the snow: but in vain will these men, or the greatest Magician that Egypt ever saw, say to a boisterous sea, *Peace, be still*; in vain will they say to a carcase rotting in the grave, *Come forth*; the winds and the sea will not obey them, and the putrid carcase will not hear them. You need not suffer yourselves to be deprived of the weight of this argument, from it's having been observed, that the Fathers have acknowledged the supernatural part of Paganism; since the Fathers were in no condition to detect a cheat, which was supported both by the disposition of the people

people, and the power of the civil magistrate; \* and they were from that inability, forced to attribute to infernal agency, what was too cunningly contrived to be detected, and contrived for too impious a purpose, to be credited as the work of God.

With respect to prophecy, you may perhaps, have accustomed yourselves to consider it, as originating in Asiatic enthusiasm, in Chaldean mystery, or in the subtle stratagem of interested Priests; and have given yourselves no more trouble concerning the predictions of sacred, than concerning the oracles of Pagan history. Or if you have ever cast a glance upon this subject, the dissensions of learned men concerning the proper interpretation of the Revelation, and other difficult prophecies, may have made you rashly conclude, that all prophecies were equally unintelligible; and more indebted for their accomplishment, to a fortunate concurrence of events, and the pliant ingenuity

\* See Lord Lyttlet. Obs. on St. Paul. p. 59.

nuity of the expofitor, than to the infpired foresight of the prophet. In all that the prophets of the old Testament have delivered, concerning the deftruction of particular cities, and the defolation of particular kingdoms, you may fee nothing but fhrewd conjectures, which any one acquainted with the hiftory of the rife and fall of empires, might certainly have made: and as you would not hold him for a prophet, who fhould now affirm that London or Paris would afford to future ages, a fpectacle juft as melancholy, as that which we now contemplate, with a figh, in the ruins of Agrigentum or Palmyra; fo you cannot perfuade yourfelf to believe, that the denunciations of the prophets againft the haughty cities of Tyre or Babylon, for inftance, proceeded from the infpiration of the Deity. There is no doubt that by fome fuch general kind of reafoning, many are influenced to pay no attention to an argument, which, if properly confidered, carries with it the ftrongeft conviction.

Spinoza



Spinoza said, That he would have broken his atheistic system to pieces, and embraced without repugnance, the ordinary faith of Christians, if he could have persuaded himself of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead; and I question not, that there are many disbelievers, who would relinquish their Deistic tenets, and receive the gospel, if they could persuade themselves, that God had ever so far interfered in the moral government of the world, as to illumine the mind of any one man with the knowledge of future events. A miracle strikes the senses of the persons who see it, a prophecy addresses itself to the understandings of those who behold it's completion; and it requires, in many cases some learning, in all some attention, to judge of the correspondence of events with the predictions concerning them. No one can be convinced, that what Jeremiah and the other prophets foretold of the fate of Babylon, that it should be besieged by the Medes; that it should be taken, when her mighty men were drunken, when her springs were dried up; and that it should  
become

become a pool of water, and should remain desolate for ever; no one, I say, can be convinced, that all these, and other parts of the prophetic denunciation, have been minutely fulfilled, without spending some time in reading the accounts, which profane Historians have delivered down to us concerning it's being taken by Cyrus; and which modern travellers have given us of it's present situation.

Porphyry was so persuaded of the coincidence between the prophecies of Daniel and the events, that he was forced to affirm, the prophecies were written, after the things prophesied of had happened; another Porphyry has, in our days, been so astonished at the correspondence between the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as related by St. Matthew, and the history of that event, as recorded by Josephus; that rather than embrace Christianity, he has ventured (contrary to the faith of all ecclesiastical history, the opinion of the learned of all ages, and all the rules of good criticism)

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to assert, that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel after Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed by the Romans. You may from these instances perceive the strength of the argument from prophecy ; it has not been able indeed to vanquish the prejudices of either the ancient or the modern Porphyry ; but it has been able to compel them both, to be guilty of obvious falsehoods, which have nothing but impudent assertions to support them.

Some over-zealous interpreters of scripture have found prophecies in simple narrations, extended real predictions beyond the times and circumstances to which they naturally were applied, and perplexed their readers with a thousand quaint allusions and allegorical conceits ; this proceeding has made men of sense pay less regard to prophecy in general ; there are some predictions however, such as those concerning the present state of the Jewish people, and the corruption of Christianity, which are now fulfilling in the world ; and which, if you will take the trouble to examine them, you will find of  
such

such an extraordinary nature, that you will not perhaps hesitate to refer them to God as their author; and if you once become persuaded of the truth of any one miracle, or of the completion of any one prophecy, you will resolve all your difficulties (concerning the manner of God's interposition, in the moral government of our species, and the nature of the doctrines contained in revelation) into your own inability fully to comprehend the whole scheme of divine providence.

We are told however, that the strangeness of the narration, and the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the new Testament, are not the only circumstances which induce you to reject it; you have discovered, you think, so many contradictions, in the accounts which the Evangelists have given of the life of Christ, that you are compelled to consider the whole as an ill-digested and improbable story. You would not reason thus, upon any other occasion; you would not reject as fabulous the accounts given by

M Livy



Livy and Polybius of Hannibal and the Carthaginians, though you should discover a difference betwixt them in several points of little importance. You cannot compare the history of the same events as delivered by any two historians, but you will meet with many circumstances; which, though mentioned by one, are either wholly omitted or differently related by the other; and this observation is peculiarly applicable to biographical writings: But no one ever thought of disbelieving the leading circumstances of the lives of Vitellius or Vespasian, because Tacitus and Suetonius did not in every thing correspond in their accounts of these emperors; and if the memoirs of the life and doctrines of M. de Voltaire himself, were some twenty or thirty years after his death, to be delivered to the world by four of his most intimate acquaintance; I do not apprehend that we should discredit the whole account of such an extraordinary man, by reason of some slight inconsistencies and contradictions, which the avowed enemies of his name might chance to discover in the several

veral narrations. Though we should grant you then, that the Evangelists had fallen into some trivial contradictions, in what they have related concerning the life of Christ; yet you ought not to draw any other inference from our concession, than that they had not plotted together, as cheats would have done, in order to give an unexceptionable consistency to their fraud. We are not however disposed to make you any such concession; we will rather shew you the futility of your general argument, by touching upon a few of the places, which you think are most liable to your censure.

You observe, that neither Luke, nor Mark, nor John have mentioned the cruelty of Herod in murdering the infants of Bethlehem; and that no account is to be found of this matter in Josephus, who wrote the life of Herod; and therefore the fact recorded by Matthew is not true.—The concurrent testimony of many independant writers concerning a matter of fact, unquestionably adds to it's probability; but if nothing is to

be received as true, upon the testimony of a single author, we must give up some of the best writers, and disbelieve some of the most interesting facts of ancient history.

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there was only an interval of three months, you say, between the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus; from which time, taking away the forty days of the temptation, there will only remain about six weeks for the whole period of his public ministry; which lasted however, according to St. John, at the least above three years. — Your objection fairly stated stands thus, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in writing the history of Jesus Christ, mention the several events of his life, as following one another in continued succession, without taking notice of the times in which they happened; but is it a just conclusion from their silence, to infer that there really were no intervals of time between the transactions which they seem to have connected? many instances might be produced from the most admired biographers of antiquity,

antiquity, in which events are related, as immediately consequent to each other, which did not happen but at very distant periods: we have an obvious example of this manner of writing in St. Matthew; who connects the preaching of John the Baptist with the return of Joseph from Egypt, though we are certain, that the latter event preceded the former by a great many years.

John has said nothing of the institution of the Lord's supper; the other Evangelists have said nothing of the washing of the disciples' feet:—What then? are you not ashamed to produce these facts, as instances of contradiction? if omissions are contradictions, look into the history of the age of Louis the fourteenth, or into the general history of M. de Voltaire, and you will meet with a great abundance of contradictions.

John, in mentioning the discourse which Jesus had with his mother and his beloved disciple, at the time of his crucifixion, says,  
that



that she with Mary Magdalene, stood near the cross; Matthew, on the other hand, says, that Mary Magdalene and the other women were there, beholding afar off: this you think a manifest contradiction; and scoffingly inquire, whether the women and the beloved disciple, which were near the cross, could be the same with those, who stood far from the cross?—It is difficult not to transgress the bounds of moderation and good manners, in answering such sophistry; what! have you to learn, that though the Evangelists speak of the crucifixion, as of one event, it was not accomplished in one instant, but lasted several hours? And why the women, who were at a distance from the cross, might not during it's continuance, draw near the cross; or from being near the cross, might not move from the cross, is more than you can explain to either us, or yourselves. And we take from you your only refuge, by denying expressly, that the different Evangelists, in their mention of the women, speak of the same point of time.

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The Evangelists, you affirm, are fallen into gross contradictions, in their accounts of the appearances, by which Jesus manifested himself to his disciples, after his resurrection from the dead; for Matthew speaks of two, Mark of three, Luke of two, and John of four. That contradictory propositions cannot be true, is readily granted; and if you will produce the place, in which Matthew says, that Jesus Christ appeared twice and *no oftener*, it will be further granted, that he is contradicted by John, in a very material part of his narration; but till you do that, you must excuse me, if I cannot grant, that the Evangelists have contradicted each other in this point; for to common understandings it is pretty evident, that if Christ appeared four times, according to John's account, he must have appeared twice, according to that of Matthew and Luke, and thrice, according to that of Mark.

The different Evangelists are not only accused of contradicting each other, but

Luke

Luke is said to have contradicted himself; for in his Gospel he tells us, that Jesus ascended into heaven from Bethany; and in the Acts of the Apostles, of which he is the reputed author, he informs us, that he ascended from Mount Olivet.—Your objection proceeds either from your ignorance of geography, or your ill-will to Christianity; and upon either supposition, deserves our contempt; be pleased, however, to remember for the future, that Bethany was not only the name of a town, but of a district of Mount Olivet adjoining to the town,

From this specimen of the contradictions, ascribed to the historians of the life of Christ, you may judge for yourselves, what little reason there is to reject Christianity upon their account; and how sadly you will be imposed upon (in a matter of more consequence to you than any other) if you take every thing for a contradiction, which the uncandid adversaries of Christianity think proper to call one,

Before

Before I put an end to this address, I cannot help taking notice of an argument, by which some philosophers have of late endeavoured to overturn the whole system of revelation: And it is the more necessary to give an answer to their objection, as it is become a common subject of philosophical conversation, especially amongst those, who have visited the continent. The objection tends to invalidate, as is supposed, the authority of Moses; by shewing, that the earth is much older, than it can be proved to be from his account of the creation, and the scripture chronology. We contend, that six thousand years have not yet elapsed, since the creation; and these philosophers contend, that they have indubitable proof of the earth's being at the least fourteen thousand years old; and they complain, that Moses hangs as a dead weight upon them, and blunts all their zeal for inquiry.\*

The Canonico Recupero, who, it seems, is engaged in writing the history of mount Etna,

\* Brydone's Travels.



Etna, has discovered a stratum of Lava, which flowed from that mountain, according to his opinion, in the time of the second Punic war, or about two thousand years ago; this stratum is not yet covered with soil, sufficient for the production of either corn or vines; it requires then, says the Canon, two thousand years, at least, to convert a stratum of lava into a fertile field. In sinking a pit near *Jaci*, in the neighbourhood of Etna, they have discovered evident marks of seven distinct lavas, one under the other; the surfaces of which are parallel, and most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth; now, the eruption, which formed the lowest of these lavas, (if we may be allowed to reason, says the Canon, from analogy) flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago.—It might be briefly answered to this objection, by denying, that there is any thing in the history of Moses repugnant to this opinion concerning the great antiquity of the earth; for though the rise and progress of arts and sciences, and the small multiplication of the human species,

species, render it almost to a demonstration probable, that man has not existed longer upon the surface of this earth, than according to the Mosaic account; yet, that the earth itself was then created out of nothing, when man was placed upon it, is not, according to the sentiments of some philosophers, to be proved from the original text of sacred scripture; we might, I say, reply, with these philosophers, to this formidable objection of the Canon, by granting it in it's full extent; we are under no necessity, however, of adopting their opinion, in order to shew the weakness of the Canon's reasoning. For in the first place, the Canon has not satisfactorily established his main fact, that the lava in question, is the identical lava, which Diodorus Siculus mentions to have flowed from Etna, in the second Carthaginian war; and in the second place, it may be observed, that the time necessary for converting lavas into fertile fields, must be very different, according to the different consistencies of the lavas, and their different situations, with respect to elevation or depression;

pression; to their being exposed to winds, rains, and to other circumstances; just as the time, in which the heaps of iron slag (which resembles lava) are covered with verdure, is different at different furnaces, according to the nature of the slag, and situation of the furnace; and something of this kind is deducible from the account of the Canon himself; since the crevices of this famous stratum are really full of rich, good soil, and have pretty large trees growing in them.

But if all this should be thought not sufficient to remove the objection, I will produce the Canon an analogy in opposition to his analogy, and which is grounded on more certain facts. Etna and Vesuvius resemble each other, in the causes which produce their eruptions, and in the nature of their lavas, and in the time necessary to mellow them into soil fit for vegetation; or if there be any slight difference in this respect, it is probably not greater than what subsists between different lavas of the same mountain.

This

This being admitted, which no philosopher will deny, the Canon's analogy will prove just nothing at all, if we can produce an instance of seven different lavas (with interjacent strata of vegetable earth) which have flowed from mount Vesuvius, within the space, not of fourteen thousand, but of somewhat less than seventeen hundred years; for then, according to our analogy, a stratum of lava may be covered with vegetable soil, in about two hundred and fifty years, instead of requiring two thousand for the purpose. The eruption of Vesuvius, which destroyed Herculaneum and Pompeii, is rendered still more famous by the death of Pliny, recorded by his nephew, in his letter to Tacitus; this event happened in the year 79; it is not yet then quite seventeen hundred years since Herculaneum was swallowed up: but we are informed by unquestionable authority, that "the matter which covers the ancient town of Herculaneum, is not the produce of one eruption only; for there are evident marks, that the matter of six  
 " eruptions



"eruptions has taken it's course over that  
 "which lies immediately above the town,  
 "and was the cause of it's destruction.  
 "These strata are either of lava or burnt  
 "matter, *with veins of good soil betwixt*  
 "*them.*"\* — I will not add another word  
 upon this subject; except that the bishop of  
 the diocese, was not much out in his advice  
 to Canonico Recupero — to take care, not  
 to make his mountain older than Moses;  
 though it would have been full as well, to  
 have shut his mouth with a reason, as to  
 have stopped it with the dread of an ecclesi-  
 astical censure.

You perceive, with what ease a little at-  
 tention will remove a great difficulty; but  
 had we been able to say nothing, in expla-  
 nation of this phænomenon, we should not  
 have acted a very rational part, in making  
 our ignorance the foundation of our infi-  
 delity,

\* See sir William Hamilton's Remarks upon the Nature  
 of the Soil of Naples and it's Neighbourhood, in the Philos.  
 Transf. Vol. lxi. p. 7.

delity, or suffering a minute philosopher to rob us of our religion.

Your objections to revelation, may be numerous; you may find fault with the account, which Moses has given of the creation and the fall; you may not be able to get water enough for an universal deluge; nor room enough in the ark of Noah, for all the different kinds of aerial and terrestrial animals; you may be dissatisfied with the command for sacrificing of Isaac, for plundering the Egyptians, and for extirpating the Canaanites; you may find fault with the Jewish œconomy, for it's ceremonies, it's sacrifices, and it's multiplicity of priests; you may object to the imprecations in the psalms, and think the immoralities of David, a fit subject for dramatic ridicule; \* you may look upon the partial promulgation of Christianity,

\* See, Saul et David Hyperdrame.

Whatever censure the author of this composition may deserve for his intention, the work itself deserves none; it's ridicule is too gross, to mislead even the ignorant.

ty, as an insuperable objection to it's truth ; and waywardly reject the goodness of God toward yourselves, because you do not comprehend, how you have deserved it more than others ; you may know nothing of the entrance of sin and death into the world, by one man's transgression ; nor be able to comprehend the doctrine of the cross and of redemption by Jesus Christ ; in short, if your mind is so disposed, you may find food for your scepticism in every page of the Bible, as well as in every appearance of nature ; and it is not in the power of any person, but yourselves, to clear up your doubts ; you must read ; and you must think for yourselves ; and you must do both with temper, with candour, and with care. Infidelity is a rank weed ; it is nurtured by our vices, and cannot be plucked up as easily as it may be planted : your difficulties, with respect to revelation, may have first arisen, from your own reflection on the religious indifference of those, whom from your earliest infancy, you have been accustomed to revere and imitate ; domestic irreligion may have made  
you

you a willing hearer of libertine conversation; and the uniform prejudices of the world, may have finished the business at a very early age; and left you to wander through life, without a principle to direct your conduct, and to die without hope. We are far from wishing you to trust the word of the Clergy for the truth of your religion; we beg of you to examine it to the bottom, to try it, to prove it, and not to hold it fast unless you find it good. Till you are disposed to undertake this task, it becomes you to consider with great seriousness and attention, whether it can be for your interest to esteem a few witty sarcasms, or metaphysic subtleties, or ignorant misrepresentations, or unwarranted assertions, as unanswerable arguments against revelation; and a very slight reflection will convince you, that it will certainly be for your reputation, to employ the flippancy of your rhetoric, and the poignancy of your ridicule, upon any subject, rather than upon the subject of Religion.

N

I take



I take my leave with recommending to your notice, the advice which Mr. Locke gave to a young man, who was desirous of becoming acquainted with the doctrines of the Christian religion. " Study the holy scripture, especially the new Testament: " therein are contained the words of eternal " life. It has God for it's author; Salvation " for it's end; and Truth without any mixture of error for it's matter \*."

I am, &c.

\* Locke's Posth. Works.

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## A P P E N D I X.

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I am obliged to a Gentleman, to whom I have not the good fortune to be personally known, for the following remarks: they were communicated to me, when these Letters were in a great measure printed off; but the public, I am persuaded, will think them too interesting to have been suppressed.

*Remarks on certain passages in Mr. Gibbon's  
" History of the Decline and Fall of the  
" Roman Empire." By R. Wynne, Rector  
of St. Alphage, London.*

IT is not a little surprizing, that this justly admired historian should discover such an excess of candour towards Nero, the most execrable monster that ever disgraced a  
N 2 throne,

throne, and at the same time an uncommon prejudice against the professors of Christianity, the innocent victims of his rage.

He gives an account of the dreadful fire that consumed the greater part of Rome (Chap. XVI. p. 532.) in the reign of Nero; and endeavours to vindicate his character from the imputation of having set the City on fire, contrary to the concurrent testimony of all the Roman historians \*. Nay, Mr. G. talks of Nero's *generosity* and *humanity*, on account of some † *popular acts*; which, as *Tacitus* hints ||, were intended to remove the suspicion of his being the incendiary. But let us hear what *Suetonius* says of this melancholy event, the cause of it, and of the emperor's behaviour on this occasion; who certainly had a better opportunity of investigating

\* *Tacit. Annal. XV. Sueton. in Neron. Dion. Cassius, Lib. LXII. p. 1014. Orosius VII. 7.*

† *Quæ quanquam popularia, &c. says Tacitus.*

|| *Sed non ope humanâ, non largitionibus principis, aut deum placamentis, decedebat infamia, quin iustum incendium crederetur. Idem. Annal. XV.*

gating the truth, (as he was born in the reign of Vespasian, \* and is reckoned a most accurate and candid writer) than our author. “ Quasi deformitate veterum ædificiorum, et angustis flexurisq; vicorum  
 “ offensus, incendit urbem *tam palam*, ut  
 “ plerique consulares, cubicularios ejus, cum  
 “ stupâ tædâque, in prædiis suis deprehensos  
 “ non attigerint: et quædam horrea circa  
 “ domum Auream, quorum spatium maximè  
 “ desiderabat, ut bellicis machinis labefactata,  
 “ atque inflammata sint, quod saxeo muro  
 “ constructa erant.” — “ Hoc incendium è  
 “ turri Mæcenatiana prospectans, lætusque  
 “ *flammæ*, ut aiebat, *pulchritudine*, *ἄλυσιν* *Ilii*  
 in illo suo scenico habitu decantavit †.”  
 Mr. G. after Tacitus, mentioning Nero’s throwing open the imperial gardens to the distressed multitude, &c. applauds his generosity. It appears very probable, however,  
 from

\* About 5 or 6 years after the fire.

† This circumstance is mentioned by Tacitus, who was born before this fire, as a report which the emperor could not suppress. *Idem. Ibid.*



from *Suetonius*, that this was done to carry the effects of the poor sufferers into his gardens, which he promised to do gratis; but would not suffer the owners to touch what the flames had spared, and converted all to his own use. “Ac ne non hinc quoque, “says his impartial biographer, quantum “posset prædæ et manubiarum invaderet, “pollicitus cadaverum et rudерum gratuitam “egestionem, nemini ad reliquias rerum suarum adire permisit.” \*

From these passages, and the authors referred to in the note above, the guilt and profligacy of *Nero*, with regard to this conflagration which lasted six days, cannot be questioned, I think, without an uncommon degree of scepticism; and a person, who by a pretended investigation of truth, endeavours to explain away a notorious matter of fact, recorded by a cotemporary and several succeeding historians, hardly deserves a serious answer.

Let

\* *Sueton.* in *Neron*. Cap. XXXVIII.

Let us now examine the account of the dreadful havock Nero made among the Christians, in order to avoid the public odium, which he had justly incurred for setting the Capital on fire, that he might enlarge his palace, &c.

“ With this view [to divert the suspicion  
 “ of his having set Rome on fire \*] he  
 “ [Nero] inflicted the most exquisite tor-  
 “ tures on those men, who, under the vulgar  
 “ appellation of Christians, were already  
 “ *branded with DESERVED infamy.*” “ They  
 “ derive their name and origin from Christ,  
 “ who in the reign of Tiberius had suffered  
 “ death, by the sentence of the procurator  
 “ Pontius Pilate.”

“ For a while, this dire superstition was  
 “ checked ; but it again burst forth ; and not  
 “ only spread itself over Judea, the first seat  
 “ of this mischievous sect, but was even in-  
 “ troduced into Rome, the common asylum,  
 which

\* Gibbon's Translation of a passage in Tacitus.

“ which receives and protects whatever is  
 “ atrocious.” “ The *confessions* of those  
 “ who were seized, discovered a great mul-  
 “ titude of *their accomplices*; and they were  
 “ all convicted, not so much for the crime  
 “ of setting fire to the city, as for THEIR  
 “ *hatred of mankind.*” “ They died in tor-  
 “ ments; and their torments were embittered  
 “ by insult and derision.” “ Some  
 “ were nailed on crosses; others sown up  
 “ in skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the  
 “ fury of dogs: others again, smeared over  
 “ with combustible materials, were used as  
 “ torches to illuminate the night.” “ The  
 “ gardens of Nero were destined for the  
 “ melancholy spectacle, which was accom-  
 “ panied with a horse race, and HONOURED  
 “ WITH THE PRESENCE of the Emperor;  
 “ who mingled with the populace in the  
 “ dress and attitude of a charioteer.” “ The  
 “ *guilt of the Christians deserved, indeed, the*  
 “ *most exemplary punishment*; but the public  
 “ abhorrence was changed into commiseration,  
 “ from the opinion that those unhappy  
 “ wretches were sacrificed, not so much to  
 “ the

“ the *rigour of justice*, as to the cruelty of  
 “ the tyrant,” \*

That the learned reader may judge, whether the above be a just translation of Tacitus's words, I shall transcribe the original passage to which the author refers; and cannot help observing, that though the Roman is far from being candid, in the account he gives of this transaction; yet the English historian is less candid in his translation and remarks on the former; notwithstanding they are both excellent historians.

“ Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit  
 “ reos, et quæsitissimis pœnis affecit, quos  
 “ (1) *per flagitia invisos* vulgus Christianos  
 “ appellabat.” “ Auctor nominis ejus Chris-  
 “ tus, qui, Tiberio imperitante, per pro-  
 “ curatorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio af-  
 “ fectus erat.” “ Repressaque in præsens  
 “ exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non  
 “ modo

\* Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Chap. XVI. p. 533, 534.



“ modo per Judæam, originem ejus mali,  
 “ sed per urbem etiam : quo cuncta undique  
 “ atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebran-  
 “ turque.” “ Igitur primò correpti *qui* (2)  
 “ *fatebantur*, deinde indicio eorum multitudo  
 “ ingens, haut perinde in crimine incendii,  
 “ quam (3) *odio humani generis* convicti  
 “ sunt.” “ Et pereuntibus addita ludibria,  
 “ ut ferarum tergis contacti, laniatu canum  
 “ interirent ; aut crucibus affixi, aut flam-  
 “ mandi, atque ubi defecisset dies, in usum  
 “ nocturni luminis urerentur.” “ Hortos suos  
 “ ei spectaculo Nero obtulerat, et Circense  
 “ ludicrum edebat, habitu aurigæ permixtus  
 “ plebi, vel circulo insistens.” “ Unde quan-  
 “ quam adversus (4) *fontes, novissima exempla*  
 “ *meritos*, miseratio oriebatur ; (5) *tanquam*  
 “ *non utilitate publicâ*, sed in sævitiam unius  
 “ absumerentur.” \*

Remarks

\* Tacit. Annal. lib. XV. Cap. 44.

*Remarks on the above passage, and Mr.  
Gibbon's translation, &c.*

It does not appear from Tacitus, that the Christians “ were branded with *deserved* infamy ;” we may learn from Pliny \*, his friend and cotemporary, the true meaning of *per flagitia invidiosos—Christianos*, which he calls *flagitia cohærentia nomini*; so that the pretended criminality was inherent in the name of Christian, which was detested by the Pagans. (2) *Qui fatebantur*, were those, who confessed that they were Christians; not that they had fired the city, of which Tacitus, as well as his translator, knew them to be innocent. The same Pliny informs us, that upon the bare confession of Christianity, they were punished even with death, if they persisted: *Confitentes, iterum ac tertio interrogavi, supplicium minatus; perseverantes duci jussi.*

The

\* Lib. X. Ep. 97.

The words of Tacitus are a little ambiguous, though he clears the Christians from the vile imputation; but there is no ambiguity in the translation; for Mr. G. makes them *confess* the crime, and *discover a great multitude of their accomplices*. It is true, he says, after Tacitus, "that they were convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city, as for their hatred of human kind." Indeed, the latter clause does not seem to convey the true meaning of Tacitus; who, by *odio humani generis*, signifies, that they were hated by all mankind; which is partly explained by his *invisos per flagitia* a little above, they were hateful on account of their name, which was reckoned infamous. This was plainly foretold by the humble founder of their religion, "that they should be hated of all men on account of his name." Add to this, that Suetonius informs us, that "Nero inflicted various punishments on the Christians, on account of their new and impious superstition;"

"tion;" \* but does not mention the slightest suspicion of their having set fire to the city, though he gives a particular account of it in another chapter † of the life of Nero. 4. It is far from acting the part of a candid and impartial historian to assert, as Tacitus does, and his translator even in stronger terms, that the Christians were *fontes, et novissima exempla meritos*, without specifying any crime that they were guilty of. Indeed he knew, or might have known, from his friend Pliny, that they were guilty of no crime; but that their religion bound them by a solemn engagement not to commit any. ||

As to Mr. Gibbon's four observations on the above passage in Tacitus, the first is obvious and incontestable; the second and third are vague conjectures, supported by  
no

\* *Afflicti suppliciiis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ ac maleficæ. Suet. in Nero. Cap. 16.*

† *Ibid. Cap. xxxviii.*

|| *Plin. Lib. x. Ep. 97.*



no authority; but the fourth is totally void of foundation, viz. "That the religious tenets of the Christians, were never made a subject of punishment; or even of enquiry." The contrary is exceedingly evident, from the Epistle of Pliny, and the passage in Suetonius quoted above; and Mr. G. refers to the latter in his first observation, so that he could not overlook it. The last instance of Mr. G's altering the sense of Tacitus in this celebrated passage, is at the conclusion; where he renders (5) *tanquam non utilitate publica*, "not so much to the rigour of justice;" as if the Christians were in some measure, *justly* punished; whereas the historian mentions only the *public utility*, which was often made the pretence for punishing the innocent Christians.

Remarks

*Remarks on the Author's account of the conduct of Pliny the younger, and the emperor Trajan, towards the Christians.*

“ Under the reign of *Trajan*,” says Mr. G. \* “ the younger *Pliny* was entrusted with  
 “ the government of *Bithynia* and *Pontus*.  
 “ He soon found himself at a loss to deter-  
 “ mine, by what rule of justice, or of law,  
 “ he should direct his conduct in the execu-  
 “ tion of an office, the most repugnant to his  
 “ humanity. *Pliny* had never assisted at  
 “ any judicial proceedings against the Chris-  
 “ tians, with whose name alone he seems to  
 “ be acquainted ; and he was totally unin-  
 “ formed with regard to the nature of their  
 “ guilt, &c.”—“ The life of *Pliny* had been  
 “ employed in the acquisition of learning,  
 “ and in the business of the world.—The  
 “ answer of *Trajan*, to which the Christians  
 “ of the succeeding age have frequently ap-  
 “ pealed,

\* Chap. xvi. p. 540, 541.

“ pealed, discovers as much regard for justice and humanity, as could be reconciled with his mistaken notion of religious policy. Instead of displaying the implacable zeal of an *inquisitor*, — the emperor expresses much more solicitude to protect the security of the innocent, than to prevent the escape of the guilty.—Though he directs the magistrates to punish such persons as are *legally* \* convicted, he prohibits, with a very *humane* inconsistency, from making any enquiries concerning the supposed criminals.”

Notwithstanding these encomiums on *Trajan* and *Pliny*, I can look upon their *mistaken notion of religious policy* † in no other light, but

\* How could they be *legally* convicted, if, as Mr. G. informs a few lines higher, “ there were no general laws or decrees of the senate in force against the Christians,—and neither *Trajan*, nor any of his virtuous predecessors, had publicly declared their intentions concerning the new sect.”

† *Melmoth*, in his translation of *Pliny's* Letters, endeavours to exculpate him by the same arguments.

but that of Intolerance; and it was the height of arrogance in the former to assume, and the most servile flattery in the latter to pay, divine honours to his master. Their Roman ancestors would have blushed to demand such base adulation, and spurned at the proposal with indignation; and yet *Pliny* uses the mean artifice of introducing the emperor's image \* among those of the gods, in order to lay a snare for the Christians. Hence their refusal to offer incense, &c. to the idols, was looked upon as want of respect to their sovereign, and construed into treason by a minion of the court, and punished accordingly. It farther appears by his own account, that this *learned, humane, and uninformed* governor, was well informed of the innocence, and inoffensive behaviour of the Christians; for, in the same letter, he gives the emperor, a candid and circumstantial account of the laudable design of their private assemblies; which, however, they

O                      had

\* *Imagini tuæ, quam propter hoc jufferam offerri, thure ac vino supplicarent.* Lib. x. Ep. 97.



had omitted, in pursuance of the edict, which he had published by his master's orders. Notwithstanding all this, in the true spirit of an *Inquisitor*, the humane Pliny put two Deaconesses to the torture, in order, as he says, to find out the truth; but found in their confession, only an excessive and bad superstition, as he calls it. With how much more dignity, as well as justice, did one of Nero's governors behave towards the apostle Paul on a similar occasion? "It is not the custom of the Romans, says *Festus* to the Jews, to give up any man to be put to death, before the accused have the accusers face to face,\* and has an opportunity of making his defence, as to the crime laid to his charge."† "Being desirous of knowing the crime, of which the Jews accused Paul, says *Lyfias* the tribune, I brought him before their council; whom I found

to

\* Those Christians, whom Pliny examined, had no other accuser, but an anonymous libel: *Propositus est libellus sine autore, multorum nomina continens.* Idem, Ibid.

† Acts xxv. 16.

“ to be accused concerning questions of their  
 “ law, but to have nothing laid to his charge  
 “ worthy of death or of bonds.”\* In the  
 same style the recorder addresses the tumultu-  
 ous citizens of *Ephesus*, “ These men, says  
 “ he, whom you have brought hither, are  
 “ neither robbers of temples, nor blasphemers  
 “ of your goddess. Therefore, if *Demetrius*,  
 “ and the artificers who are with him, have  
 “ a charge against any one, the courts are  
 “ open, and there are proconsuls; let them  
 “ implead one another.”†

*Pliny* likewise tells the emperor, “ That,  
 “ let their confession be what it would, he  
 “ *did not doubt*, but their perseverance and  
 “ inflexible obstinacy ‡ ought to be pu-  
 O 2 nish-

\* Acts xxiii. 28, 29, 30.

† Acts xix. 37, 38.

‡ This heroic constancy and inflexibility, ought rather to  
 have been admired by a Roman.

Justum et tenacem propositi virum

Non civium ardor prava jubentium,

Non vultus instantis tyranni,

Mente quatit solidâ —

Hor. Lib. III. Ode 3.

nished." \* *Trajan*, by his answer, approves of what *Pliny* had done with regard to the Christians; and though he would not have him search for such victims to his tyranny, yet he orders them to be punished, unless they renounced their religion: however, he disapproved of anonymous libels, about which his governor of *Bithynia* seems to hesitate.

Before I dismiss this remarkable Epistle, I cannot help observing, that it seems to contradict Mr. G's assertion, about the small number of Christians in the Roman empire, and the contemptible light in which they were looked upon by the Roman magistrates. "Many, says *Pliny*, of every age, rank, and sex, are, and will be, brought to a trial; nor are cities only, but villages, and the country infected with the contagion of that superstition—It is certainly evident  
" that

\* *Neque enim dubitabam, qualecunque esset quod faterentur, pervicaciam certè, et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri. Lib. x. Ep. 97.*

“ that the temples which were almost de-  
 “ ferted, begin to be frequented; and the  
 “ sacrifices, which had been long intermitted,  
 “ begin to be renewed \*, &c.

\* Multi omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexûs etiam, vocantur in periculum, et vocabuntur. Neque enim civitates tantùm, sed vicos etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est: quæ videtur fisti et corrigi posse. Certè satis constat, propè jam desolata templa cœpisse celebrari, et sacra solennia diu intermissa repeti; passimque vœnire victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur. *Idem, Ibid.*

This was in consequence of the persecution carried on by Pliny and his mild and humane master.

REMARKS





R E M A R K S  
ON THE  
TWO LAST CHAPTERS  
OF  
MR. GIBBON'S HISTORY,  
OF THE  
DECLINE AND FALL  
OF THE  
R O M A N E M P I R E,  
IN A  
LETTER TO A FRIEND.

—Cumque talis prodisset, ut præstigiis quibusdam admirandis facile posset imponere lectori vel imperito, vel simplici, vel parum attento, non fuit consilium prorsus obtescere; præsertim cum sint, quibus nihil non arrideat, quod diversam factionem adjuvet.

ERASMI Op. V. ix. p. 123. Ed. Clerici.

R E M A R K S

ON THE

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OF

MR. GIBBON'S HISTORY

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—Causas talis prohibet, ut praeiudicium dubitandum animi-  
munda facit potest impetere lectori vel imperito, vel im-  
pudicis vel parum attento, non tunc conditionem proutis, obli-  
voscere; praeterea cum sine quibus nihil non videtur, quod  
deperit actionem adiuvet.

BRASSER Op. V. in p. 114. Ed. Clarend.

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DEAR SIR,

**Y**OU have been pleased to desire my thoughts on a late distinguished publication. I have considered the work, with some degree of attention, and especially that part of it, to which your questions principally relate. Such remarks as have occurred to me, are wholly at your service.

Every true friend to Christianity, cannot but feel himself interested in the concluding chapters of Mr. Gibbon's History. It is much to be lamented, that "the melancholy duty imposed upon the historian," \* should have appeared to him, so sacred, and indispensable. The validity of this plea may well be contested, should it be found, that

one

\* Ch. 15. p. 450. The first edition is all along referred to.



one unhappy bias prevails throughout the whole course of his researches; that the Apologists of Christianity, are vilified on every occasion; the objections of its adversaries industriously brought forward, and the testimonies in favour of our religion, sometimes wholly concealed, at other times misrepresented.

The passages which I allude to, from the nature of the work itself, affect only, for the most part, the history of the first ages of Christianity. But there are also, far too many oblique and ungenerous insinuations, which fail not to suggest their own proper inferences, and which affect materially, the general credit of Christianity.

The enemy himself in the mean time, often lies hid behind the shield of some bolder warrior; and shoots his envenomed darts, under the protection of some avowed heretic, of the age.—It may be added, that the singular address of the historian, has served even to make the laboured arguments

ments of modern writers, coincide with the description of a remote period of antiquity; and has introduced many well-known objections to Christianity, which the refined scepticism of the present age, claims for its own. \* I shall endeavour to oppose his oblique censures, by open argument; and shall enquire into the real weight of the objections, which he has thought fit to set before us, with the strictest candour.

It should be remarked carefully, that it is not the author's design, to account for the propagation of Christianity from its earliest date, but during a particular period only.

The first, and most remarkable period of the history of its miraculous propagation, will

\* We are obliged to attribute to the present age, the invention of many metaphysical subtleties, and perhaps of some arguments of another kind; but for the most part, even the licentiousness of modern infidelity, has been only able to revive old arguments, disguised under some new form. This is a truth, which must strike every one, versed in the history of infidelity, with the strongest conviction.

will not certainly, be found, to be concerned in his disquisitions, since it is not comprehended in his design. He will be found on examination, to have considered only, that later period, which commences after the times of the Apostles, and which exhibits to us not the first planting, but the successive increase of Christianity, after it had already taken root, and covered a very extensive tract of country.

If at any time he ascends higher, he deviates, strictly speaking, from his proper subject.

Our author has not indeed made any formal declaration, from what period he means to enquire into the progress of the establishment of Christianity, because, probably it did not seem necessary. It must naturally be concluded, that he cannot have meant to enter into any earlier disquisition on the subject, than falls within the immediate compass of his history.

Respecting

Respecting his general plan, he acquaints us, that it is his design, in his three first and introductory chapters, “to describe the  
 “the prosperous condition of the empire,  
 “and afterwards from the death of Marcus  
 “Antoninus to deduce the most important  
 “circumstances of its decline and fall.” \*  
 But the death of Marcus Antoninus, happened towards the close of the second century; and we must conclude therefore, even in justice to the historian, that his enquiry, as to its express and immediate design, cannot be meant to be carried any higher; and is not consequently, at all concerned about the propagation of Christianity, in the age of the Apostles.

But this age, contains the most striking period, of the history, of the propagation, of our religion.—A period, nevertheless so short, that taking its date, before the middle of the first century, it does not extend even to the close of it.

The

\* Ch. i.



The last apostolic journey of St. Paul, ended in the year sixty eight. In the course of little more than thirty years after the death of Christ, his doctrine was spread, through a great part of the known world.

It was spread from the Euphrates to the Tiber, even in the most populous cities; and the foolishness of preaching overcame the wisdom of famous orators, and philosophers, as the steady piety of its votaries, overcame also the formidable opposition, of its most zealous enemies.

And the evidence of this period, it appears then we are still left in full possession of.

A period of such peculiar importance in the annals of Christianity, that the judicious advocate of our faith, will ever, principally insist on it. He will however insist also, tho' in a less degree, on the succeeding singular growth of Christianity, amidst the most cruel persecutions, and in spite of the most  
 terri-

terrifying opposition. He will not decline, to give an answer, to many even of the most favourite objections, that are sometimes urged, as to the character and conduct of the first Christians; nor refuse to meet the enemy of his faith, though he has artfully made a diversion, into a country, which he is less properly called on, to defend.

With regard however to the character of the first Christians, the matter may perhaps, fairly be stated thus.

It is a debt, that we owe certainly to their memories, that we owe to Christianity in general, to keep them untainted, as far as may be, by the breath of slander; and we need not fear on the whole to affirm, that their lives did honour to their profession. But if on the other hand, the sentiments of individuals should sometimes be found uncharitable and unbecoming; if even their lives should have been disgraceful to their faith, we are in no sort, concerned to defend their cause, as the cause of Christianity itself.

itself. We may lament that so pure a religion should so soon have contracted a mixture of corruption, even during her first residence on earth, but we may find comfort in the reflection, that every material evidence, by which it is supported, still remains in full force; and that the authentic records of her doctrines, may still teach us what fruits they ought to have brought forth in others, and should yet produce in us.

I shall now beg leave to turn your attention, to some of our author's disquisitions, as they present themselves in order. It is by no means my design to follow him through all his researches. My remarks will be confined rather to particular passages; and it will be more especially my object, to examine diligently into the force of the several testimonies collected, in support of his assertions; since should these be found to fail, the superstructure built upon them, must fall in consequence. I shall attend particularly also, to such short but significant reflections, not immediately relating to the subject

subject of his history, as our author has occasionally indulged himself in, in the course of his general notes. From these, perhaps the true temper and design of our historian may best be collected, since in attending to them, we follow him as it were, into his most secret recesses, and hear him speaking in his own person. For all such reflections too, he is more immediately accountable, should it be found, that the history itself can by no means be said to have required them.

Much stress is laid by our author, on his first supposed cause of the rapid growth of the Christian church. Yet how “an inflexible, and intolerant zeal,” \* such as condemned even the most harmless ceremonies of paganism, could invite Pagans, amidst all their prejudices, to embrace Christianity, does not seem altogether easy to explain. It might indeed produce the only effect, our author, in the recapitulation of his argument, † has assigned to it; it might supply

P

Christians

\* P. 450.

† P. 502.



Christians with that invincible valour, which should keep them firm to their received principles, but it could hardly be of service in converting Pagans. Is not then this secondary cause, inadequate to its declared effect?

To the next cause alleged, we may certainly attribute more force; and the friends of Christianity, will very readily acknowledge the doctrine of a future life, brought to light by the gospel, to have had its share in spreading the belief of it. But with what propriety can this be considered, as an human cause? Is not this distinguished excellence of the Christian revelation, to be considered rather as a part of "the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself," \* and as belonging to the very essence of the gospel? If so, it is altogether improperly enumerated, among "the secondary causes which assisted the truth of the Christian religion." †

The

\* P. 450.

† P. 502.

The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church, are assigned as a third cause. We may here also readily join issue with our author. But we may at the same time remind him, that he gains no step towards accounting for the growth of Christianity, from "human causes," \* while he sets before us, the supposed extraordinary interposition of the hand of God.

Thus much, of his general delineation of the causes of the growth of the Christian church. Let us proceed now to consider such disquisitions, as present themselves in his particular display of them.

Among the first objects of his researches, the sects of the Ebionites and Gnostics, hold a distinguished place.

It will not be a matter of much wonder to any one, who considers the authoritative and express decision, of the great Apostle of the

P 2

Gentiles

\* P. 479.

Gentiles—who considers the general tenor and spirit of the gospel—that in process of time at least, those who like the Ebionites, contended for the retaining the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, as a part of the system of Christianity, should be openly condemned and rejected, by every true Christian.

If an intemperate degree of zeal, exerted in a good cause, unhappily transported many into a culpable extreme, and led them not only to “exclude their judaizing brethren “from the hope of salvation,” but to decline also, “any intercourse with them, in the “common offices of social life,” \* we have certainly to lament, the error of those who knew not what spirit they were of.

But on the other hand, to have treated those, who, while they professed themselves Christians in principle, were Jews in practice, as real and perfect Christians, would have been to forego the plain and decisive precepts

\* P. 459.

precepts of the gospel, which, when that which was perfect was now come, enjoined, that that which was imperfect, should be done away.

The history of the Gnostics, were it fully displayed, would afford room for several important observations. It might be shown, that their knowledge was not indeed according to truth, was rather in many instances in direct opposition to it, and that their objections seem to have flowed principally, from that fruitful source of error, even in later times, a vain affectation of science, falsely so called. Let us for the present, content ourselves, with collecting such scattered features of their true portraiture, as even our author himself, who must be allowed certainly to have done full justice to their objections, may supply us with.

I cannot however but make mention of the profane derision of the Gnostics, in one instance. There is something so extremely daring and horrible, in giving the soft epithet



thet of “ venal,” \* to an offence committed in defiance of the exprefs command of God, delivered by himfelf;—there is fuch a flagrant want of truth, in afferting “ eternal “ condemnation to have been pronounced “ againft human kind” † for this offence of their firft progenitors, when every circumftance of God’s fentence, relates to this life only; when no mention whatfoever, is made, of human kind in general, ‡ that we may well wonder, to find fuch objections, repeated, by the too-faithful hiftorian.

For the reft, let us avail ourfelves of his own acknowledgments, that the objections of the Gnoftics, were “ petulantly urged, “ thro’ vain fcience, § that they delivered “ themfelves to the guidance of a difordered “ imagination; that they degraded the honour of religion, || and impioufly repretented the God of Ifrael” ¶ under a character, which cannot indeed belong to him.

We

\* P. 460. † P. 469. ‡ See Genesis, ch. 3. v. 16---20.  
§ P. 461. || P. 462. ¶ P. 460.

We may well apply on this occasion, a very judicious remark, which we borrow from our author himself. "The enemies of a religion, never understand it, because they hate it; and they often hate it, because they do not understand it. They adopt the most atrocious calumnies against it." \*

If notwithstanding all this, the Gnostics contributed to assist, rather than retard, the progress of Christianity, † they seem at

\* "Les ennemis d'une religion ne la connoissent jamais, parceq'ils la haïssent, et souvent ils la haïssent, parceq'ils ne la connoissent pas. Ils adoptent contre elle les calomnies les plus atroces." GIBBON, Essai sur l'étude de la littérature. Lond. 1761. p. 111.

I am happy to seize an opportunity of acknowledging, that that attention to the Belles Lettres, which is displayed in the course of this work, forms its least merit. It is preceded by an English dedication, which does the utmost honour to the author's heart. A dedication from A SON, distinguishing himself in literature, at an early period of life, addressed in the warmest terms of affection, to A RESPECTED FATHER. I had *almost* said, LET THIS EXPIATE !

† P. 462.

at least to have formed their converts, very imperfectly, while " they required not any " belief of that antecedent revelation," \* which duly understood, forms an indispensable part of the genuine system of Christianity.

An extreme abhorrence of idolatry, is described to us, as a striking feature, of the character of the first Christians. This will not surely be condemned by those, who are themselves turned from vain idols, to the living God,

It is indeed impossible to worship God and Jupiter; and if the zeal of Christians sometimes carried them to a scrupulous abhorrence of the very appearance of idolatry, even in its most harmless forms, it may be remembered, that they were expressly enjoined to abstain from all appearance of evil.

What

\* P. 462.

What wonder then, if those, who were peculiarly called upon, not to serve vain idols, fled even from “ the most sacred festivals of the Roman ritual, if they abhorred even the humane licence of the Saturnalia, and refused to hail the genial powers of fecundity ;” \* when these festivals were destined to indulge the pious remembrance of the dead, with idolatrous ceremonies, when, to partake of them, implied necessarily, a belief of the system of Polytheism!

What wonder, if devoted as they were, to worship the Deity, in spirit and in truth, they remained unmoved by the splendor and pomp of external ceremonies, if even “ the elegant forms, and agreeable fictions of the Greeks,” and the beautiful mythology † of the poets, made no impression on those who were not engaged in the search of  
what

\* P. 465.

† P. 465. Our author's description of Paganism, in his former work, already quoted, is somewhat more accurate. *Ce systéme riant, mais absurde.* p. 109.



what was alluring to the eye, or pleasing to the imagination, but dedicated only, to the solemn study of pure religion!

In the course of a display, of the doctrines of a future state among the Pagans of Greece and Rome, we find it acknowledged that even "the most sublime efforts of philosophy" cannot ascertain its existence.\* We are obliged to our author, for confirming anew, the important arguments of others, in favour of the necessity of that revelation, which in the general course of his disquisitions, he seems insensible of the value of. I shall not detain you long on this head. It seems only necessary to offer a few remarks in vindication of the canonical authority of the Apocalypse.

"In the council of Laodicea, we are told, the Apocalypse was tacitly excluded from the sacred canon, by the same churches of Asia, to which it was addressed." † No  
new

\* P. 468.

† Note 65. p. lxix.

new objection this! But since it has been thought proper, to bring it forward again into view, why is it not introduced, with a more exact state of the case? From this, it must for ever appear, at the very worst, that the point in question, is strictly problematical, and that in the course of the debate, at least, neither side, can claim a decisive victory. If it cannot be shewn absolutely, that the Apocalypse was tacitly approved by the council, so neither can it be shewn, that it was tacitly excluded.

The true state of the case, is briefly this. It should be remarked, that it seems plainly to have been the immediate object of the council, not to establish a complete canon of the scriptures, but to ascertain only, what books, among those that were deemed canonical, should be publicly read, in the churches. They decree first, that no books which were composed only by private persons, should be read, nor any other that were not canonical; but only those, which belonged to the canon of the Old and New

Testa-

Testament.\* They then proceed to determine, † which of these should be read, and in their list of the books of the New Testament, the Apocalypse is not found included.

No direct reason, is given then for the omitting to make mention of the Apocalypse. It is not proscribed, but it is not enjoined to be read. ‡ It has been conjectured, therefore, not without seeming probability, that this was occasioned only, by its being thought, too mysterious to be rightly understood by common hearers. §

But of such importance does this problematical objection appear to our author, that he

\* Can. 59. Conc. Laod. Beveregii Synodicon, Ox. 1672. Tom. 1. p. 480.

† Can. 60. *ibid.* 481.

‡ See Twells's critical examen of the new text and version of the New Testament, p. 3. where this point is fully considered.

§ See Bp. Cofin's scholastical history, of the canon of scripture, ch. vi. lxii.

he is able to assign no other cause, for the Apocalypse's having been received by the Protestant churches, than, " the advantage " of turning its mysterious prophecies against " the see of Rome."

We cannot indeed adopt the cause he has assigned, but we will supply him, not with one reason in the place of it, but with many and abundant reasons.

In less than threescore years after the council of Laodicea, the Synod of Carthage, reckons the Apocalypse by name, among the canonical books of the New Testament. \* And in the seventh century, the sixth general council, fully established the authority of this Synod, and confirmed its decrees. †

The testimonies of the Fathers in favour of the authenticity of this book are numerous.

We

\* Conc. Carthag. can. 47. tom. 2. Conc. Labbe.

† Bev. Synod. Can. 2. tom. 1. p. 158.



We may allege, those of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clemens, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and Lactantius; to omit mentioning several others.\* We need not therefore seemingly be at a loss, as our author is, to account for the reception of the Apocalypse, even in the Greek churches, when we find so many of the Greek, as well as the Latin Fathers, bearing testimony to it. Much less need we assign, an unworthy, and interested reason for its reception in the protestant churches.

Indeed the very eminent writer, whom our author has chosen to refer to, (not surely for a confirmation of the whole of his remark) might have suggested to his thoughts, the reasons that have led the several churches,  
to

\* J. Martyr dial. xx. 4 or 6. Irenæus, l. 4. c. 37. Origen Comment in Joann. xiv. 6, 7. Cyprian de bon. pudicit. xxii. 9. Lact. Ep. c. xliii. Tertull. adv. Marc. l. 3. c. xiv.

The several passages of the Fathers, that bear testimony to the scriptures, may be seen under one view, in a very useful work, by the Rev. Mr. Atkinson, entitled, a Table of the Evidence of the Sacred Canon.

to receive the Apocalypse, as canonical. On consulting his elegant discourses, we shall find the use of the apocalyptic prophecies, against the church of Rome, touched on, by the hand of a master; \* but we shall find the same able interpreter of these prophecies, agreeing with those who consider this book, as more strongly attested, than even any other book, of the New Testament. †

One word, concerning, “ the condemnation of the wisest and most virtuous of the “ Pagans,” stated by our author, as the unanimous doctrine of the primitive church. || It may not be improper to remark, that “ the vehement Tertullian,” is here, the only evidence appealed to. Nor is it on this occasion

\* Bp. Hurd's Sermon xii. vol. 2. p. 208.

† Sermon x. p. 111. (note) vol. 2. 2d. edit. 12mo. 1773. The observation introduced there, ought not to be passed over.—“ If the authority of this momentous book be “ indeed questionable, the church of Rome could hardly “ have failed long since to make the discovery, or to triumph in it.”

|| P. 473.

occasion only, but on many others also, \* that he is brought forward to view, as if we were to consider him, as our author's favourite witness. It must be confessed, that the writings of this "zealous African," however they may on many accounts deserve our respect, sometimes also, breathe a spirit, altogether contrary to the plain dictates of Christian charity, and still oftener exhibit instances of a mistaken piety, that is rather enthusiastic, than rational. How far it became our author to select diligently, the blemishes that stain the writings of this intemperate advocate of Christianity; how far even "the melancholy duty imposed on the "historian," on this, as well as other occasions, may serve to plead his apology, we have ventured to assert, is at least uncertain.

There may be those among the fathers of the church, who have openly asserted the crime of "obstinately persisting," in the worship

\* See notes 39. 41. 45. 47. 49. 83, &c. and p. 484.

worship of false deities, when they had it in their power to know the true God. St. Paul had declared men inexcusable, for their idolatry, even under a reference to the light of nature only.\* But to warn men of their sins, and to pronounce their absolute condemnation, in consequence of those sins, are distinct things. It might well be said, that those obstinate idolaters, who wilfully shut their eyes against the light of nature and revelation, did not “*deserve pardon*” of the deity. If our author means to assert, that the fathers taught that neither could such pardon “*be expected*” by any means, this requires further proof; and cannot be granted on the sole evidence of the inhuman and uncharitable declamation, of “the stern Tertullian.”

But it is not the faith of the primitive church alone, that undergoes the severity of our author's censure. The same offensive doctrine, he asserts, is still “the *public doctrine*”

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\* Rom. i. 20, 21.



trine of *all* the Christian churches.\* But he asserts it wholly without proof. I cannot but presume to enter a protest against our author's judgment, at least in the name of one church, the church of England; and am bold to affirm, that her mild decisions, are not stained with so foul a blot, as, "the condemnation of the wisest and most virtuous Pagans."

In the mean time let him blush at the remembrance, of having included that church of which he is himself a member, in so severe a censure, without even attempting to bring proof of the truth of his assertion.

I should be but ill inclined to take any notice of our author's disquisitions concerning the miraculous powers of the primitive church, had not some reflections fallen from him (not perhaps necessarily suggested by his immediate subject) which affect materially, the faith of modern Christians. "That  
" very

\* Note 68. p. lxx.

"very free and ingenious inquiry," which, in his own words, "appears to have excited a general scandal among the divines of our own, as well as of the other churches of Europe," met with many learned antagonists. To enter again into so recent a controversy, to repeat answers, so easy to be consulted, would be altogether superfluous.

But the description that he gives us of the faith of modern times, is indeed melancholy and alarming. "A latent, and even involuntary scepticism adheres to the most pious dispositions. Their admission of supernatural truths, is much less an active consent, than a cold and passive acquiescence. Accustomed long since to observe and to respect the invariable order of nature, our reason, or at least our imagination is not sufficiently prepared to sustain the visible action of the Deity." \*

Q 2

I would

\* P. 478.

I would willingly hope, that there can be but little reason to think that such scepticism adheres to, "the most pious dispositions," or that they admit "the supernatural truths" of the gospel but with a cold and passive "acquiescence." An active inquiry into the authenticity of Revelation, (and such surely we must expect from pious dispositions) will not fail to produce an active, ready, and willing consent. Later histories do indeed set before us, "the invariable order of nature," rather than "the visible action of the Deity" employed, in changing its course, for the purpose of sealing his authentic instructions, in the sight of his creatures. But this affords no argument against our believing fully, the wonders of former ages, when sufficiently attested to us. In such case the space of time, which has passed since, may well be said, to be, in a manner, annihilated. Through the medium of authentic history, we are set in the place, as it were, of actual spectators of the events, and no "respect" can be due, "to the invariable order of nature" that is not far exceeded  
by

by the respect due to "the authentic wonders of the evangelic history,"\* when the end plainly seems worthy of the interposition of God. A rational faith thus acquired, will indeed become naturally, "a deep impression," and may be justly celebrated, as the Christian's truest boast.

But the objection we have been considering, is in reality no other than the well known argument of Mr. Hume, cloathed in a new form, for the present occasion. It has been so often and so fully answered, that it is needless to take further notice of it.† We shall readily acknowledge, that the doctors of the church of England, are to be reckoned among those, "more rigid," but orthodox teachers, who consider "the moral virtues as destitute of any value, or efficacy, in the work of our justification."

We

\* P. 479.

† See Dr. Adam's Essay on miracles,—Dr. Campbell's inquiry, &c. and the late Dr. Powell's sermons.



We will only add, that these rigid doctors, tho' they exclude the moral virtues from the office of justifying, teach at the same time, the absolute necessity of practising them.

The well-known reproach of Celsus, "when it is cleared from misrepresentation, contributes, says our author, to the honour of the church." We readily acquiesce in the observation.

But we may not perhaps be willing to acknowledge, that, the influx of "the most abandoned of sinners,"\* contributed so much to the increase of the church, as he seems to imagine.

That many abandoned sinners, were converted in the first ages of Christianity, may readily be granted; but that the number of those who needed no repentance was greater, may likewise be asserted.

The

The testimony of Origen, who in the opinion even of our author, “ was intimately acquainted with the history of the Christians” \* is express,

“ If

\* Ch. 16. p. 546. However Origen may sometimes meet with respect from our author, he stands elsewhere accused of the most disingenuous conduct in *mutilating* the objection of his adversary Celsus (see note 101. p. lxxi.) I am not able to discover the least traces of mutilation; but had there even been room for suspicion, I should have thought candour had obliged me to be very cautious in exhibiting the accusation, in an instance in which there is no opportunity of comparing the passage, with the original.—I should have been the more cautious, because the method which Origen has pursued, bespeaks the utmost fairness in his proceedings. He does not interweave the objections of his adversary, as he might have done, into the body of his text, but states them separately, to all appearance at least, in his own words. But to pass by all this. I am sorry to be obliged to add, that the charge of *mutilation*, in this case, lies at our author’s door. Origen expressly denies the accusation of Celsus, and does not attempt to answer his objection, because, as he asserts, it appears wholly upon a false supposition. —Εἶτα παλιν, ὡς εἶπεν τῷ Κέλσῳ, φέρει ἐν τοῖς ἑξῆς, λεγὼν ὅτι αὐτοῦ ἡμῶν ἀνεγράψεν, καὶ φησὶ τοιαῦτα· and then, (having quoted the objection) πρὸς τούτων οὐχ εἶμι λόγος, καὶ γὰρ λέγει τις ἡμῶν.

After this, we at least cannot agree with our author, that Celsus has urged his objection, *with great candour*; and we may

“ If any one, says he, will candidly consider us Christians, we can produce him more who have been converted from a life not the worst, than from a very wicked course. For they whose conscience speaks favourably in their behalf, are disposed to wish, that our doctrine concerning the future rewards of the good, may be true; and so are more ready to assent to the gospel, than profligate men.” \*

Nor do we think indeed, that “ the sudden emotions of shame, of grief, and of terror,” can be looked upon as necessary, towards a rational conversion; nor is the general question concerned about “ wonderful conversions,” when we treat of the many thousands that were converted in the first ages of Christianity.

That

may ask, how it can be supposed, that Origen, even had he been shewn to be capable of it, would *mutilate* an objection, which he meant to expose, as founded on a *false* assertion!

\* Origen contra Cels. Lib. 3.

That Christ also, as well as his Apostles, did indeed often address themselves to "those who were oppressed by the consciousness of their vices," is indisputably true. But we do not find however, that such alone were converted, tho' the saving truths of the gospel were often more immediately urged to them, because they stood most in need, of having them peculiarly enforced. Our divine master, may best apologize for his own conduct, in a manner worthy of himself. "They that are whole, need not a physician, but they that are sick."

That some of the first Christians were averse to the business of war and government, cannot be disputed.

But we must not admit this as a general description of their conduct, or as the common practice, or determination of the church.

Many, it is certain, bore arms, and discharged public offices. A variety of testimonies



monies might be produced, to shew that they were at least in all respects, as useful to society, as their consciences would permit. That they contributed in many respects, to promote the business of civil society, even our author may assure us, when he remarks that the converts of the new religion “ were “ permitted to increase their separate proper- “ ty, by all the lawful means of trade and “ industry.” \*

It should be remarked too, that these offices and employments which some declined, were usually clogged with such circumstances and conditions, as in their opinions interfered wholly with the precepts of Christianity. The reason of their conduct will therefore, in such cases, be as evident, as it is honourable.

Our author's attempt to account for the growth of Christianity, from secondary causes,

\* P. 405.

causes, does not end with the display of those five principal causes, which he has chosen to insist on. One circumstance is yet behind, which as we find it stated, is to be looked upon as almost alone sufficient, to explain its rapid and extended propagation.

But should we be inclined, to attribute some part of the success of Christianity, to the sceptical state, of the minds of Pagans, it surely cannot be thought, to have had any great share, in the work. If the minds of many were already estranged from their own numberless deities, can it be conceived yet, that they would be altogether willing to embrace a new religion, in which they could discern *no deity* at all, for the object of their worship? That the first Christians, were for this very reason, in general considered as Atheists, our author, has afforded us sufficient proof. If the generality, had conceived an aversion for the absurd customs of their own external rites, would they yet, readily become converts to a form of worship, simple  
and

and unadorned, without temples, \* and without images, and undoubtedly very ill calculated, to attract the servile veneration of the people? If, as it should seem, our author's character of Christianity, considered as "a  
 "revelation, adorned with all, that could  
 "attract the curiosity, the wonder, and the  
 "veneration of the people," † must be understood to relate to its form of worship, and its external ceremonies, I cannot but wholly differ from him in opinion, as the contrary, I think may be undeniably proved. The New Testament itself is an unanswerable proof of it, the only authority, by which such a testimony can be decided, and the only one to which a protestant at least can appeal, to determine the question.

Nor have we as yet descended in the course of our author's history, into those times, in which

\* This is well known, for some time, to have been literally the case; and when afterwards churches were erected, they were wholly destitute of the splendor of heathen temples.

† P. 505.

which the spirit of Christianity became corrupted, and the pure religion of Jesus, unhappily received into its bosom, the treacherous pagentry of paganism. The natural simplicity of its worship, could not but be preserved, while it still continued at open war, even with the most harmless ceremonies of idolatry.

But why too, conclude, that the incredulity of the speculative philosopher, would so readily communicate itself to the multitude; that the people, incapable surely in general, of comprehending the refined scepticism of their superiors, would yet at once forsake those doctrines "to which they had yielded "the most implicit belief?"\* If we may argue from present facts (and it is a position of our author's, that the human heart is still the same)† it is fully seen, that the same deluding ceremonies, as have unhappily produced in our own times, the melancholy effect of precipitating, the higher ranks of men, into  
a total

\* P. 504.

† N. 112. p. lxii.



a total desertion of religion, still retain at the same time, their full hold, on the minds of the people. The multitude has not in any sort shaken off, the chains of bigotry, in consequence of the free, and avowed principles, of their superiors.

It is granted too that the higher ranks of the pagans, in practice, still “affected to treat with respect and decency, the religious institutions of their country.” \* And it would require surely, more penetration, than usually falls to the lot, of the people, to discern “their secret contempt.” †

I cannot indeed but consider, the system of reasoning, which seeks to account for the growth of Christianity, from the scepticism of pagans, as materially affected by fact, by the repeated proceedings of the pagan multitude. “The impatient clamours of the multitude, dooming the Christians to the severest tortures; on the stated returns of  
“ the

\* P. 504.

† P. 504.

"the public games and festivals," \* but ill agree with the idea of an actual disposition to receive the religion of Christians, and to forsake the Gods, to whose memory, these games and festival were dedicated. On the whole, surely our author must at least be said, to have drawn far too general an inference, when he ventures to assert, that those who are inclined to pursue such reflections, as a consideration of the scepticism of the pagan world, suggests, "instead of viewing with  
"astonishment, the rapid progress of Christianity, will perhaps be surprised, that its  
"success was not still more rapid and still more universal." †

That the peace and union of the Roman empire facilitated the progress of Christianity, will readily be granted; and it has been ingeniously remarked, that this circumstance, may serve to point out, to those who are curious, to enquire into the reason of the late appearance of Christianity, the propriety

\* Ch. xvi. p. 543.

† Ch. xv. p. 505.

propriety of that fulness of time which was fixed on, by the providence of the Almighty, for the introduction of Revelation.

I shall not follow our author, through all his nicer calculations of the numbers of the first Christians. They must at least be allowed, to be in part conjectural, and the testimonies of Tacitus and Pliny, afford us positive and unsuspected evidence. Nor do I see, why that candid allowance, \* should so humanely be extended to their "vague expressions" which is not in any sort granted to the "splendid exaggeration" of Justin Martyr. † Their testimonies certainly do not so much stand in need of it, and it cannot be said, that "the measure of their belief was regulated by that of their wishes." ‡

But, the language of Tacitus "is almost similar to the stile employed by Livy, " when

\* P. 509.

† P. 512.

‡ Ibid.

“ when he relates the introduction and suppression of the rites of Bacchus.” \* Perhaps the similitude, on an accurate comparison, will not be easily discovered. It is a common indefinite mode of expression, to speak of “ a great multitude,” † and it does not seemingly stand in need of the aid of conjecture, to justify it. The reason that may be given for the style of Livy, will not at all apply to the narrative of Tacitus. In the former case, the Roman government, was really alarmed, on account of the reputed numbers of the Bacchanals, who might well be expected to rise in arms. And the historian accordingly relates the real apprehensions of the senate. In the latter case, in however criminal a light, the unhappy victims of Nero’s cruelty, might otherwise be regarded, they had at least uniformly shewn themselves obedient subjects, and they are expressly described, as selected only, as so many destined sacrifices, to suppress, if possible,

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\* P. 509.

† Ingens multitudo. Tacit. 15. 44.



possible, the rumour that had prevailed against the emperor. Tacitus therefore could have no occasion for adopting a language, suited to express the fears of the Roman people.

Much less can this reasoning be applied to the testimony of Pliny. His letter shews, that he was alarmed only, by the number of those that would be in danger of *suffering*,\* should a rigid persecution be enforced, not of those, who might endanger the peace of the Roman government, through a rebellious disposition. His conduct is evidently that of the prudent politician, desirous of saving the lives of his master's subjects, not of the affrighted magistrate, dreading an insurrection. †

But

\* *Visa est enim mihi res digna consultatione, maxime propter periclitantium numerum.* Plin. Epist. xcvi. Lib. x.

† The candour of our author, celebrates the Roman governor, by the title of the *humane* Pliny. Yet this humane gover-

But perhaps it will still be contended, that allowance must be made for an oratorical stile. It should be remarked here, that he acquaints Trajan, that "the temples which were almost forsaken, *begin* to be frequented, that the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, *are revived*, and that the victims likewise are every where bought up, whereas for some time, there *were* few purchasers. \* So that could he be supposed to have been at all influenced by fear, it appears that at the actual time of his writing, the prospect of affairs was such, as might inspire him with fresh hopes. What appearances are there then, of exaggeration? But the very improbability of the supposition,

R 2

duly

governor, dissatisfied with the testimony that even those, who had *revolted* from the religion of the Christians, had given of the innocence of their worship, and the purity of their manners, judges it even the more necessary, to examine, *by torture*, two unhappy *women*. Surely he exhibits a bad specimen of his own *humanity*. See his letter already quoted.

\* See the letter, as before.

duly considered, might otherwise serve to refute it. \*

The discussion of one point more, shall conclude my examination of this chapter.

The inattention of the sages of Greece and Rome, to the convincing evidence of miracles, is stated by our author, as matter of much surprise. And the omission of the darkness of the passion, in the works of two distinguished philosophers, is made the occasion of a problem, which those who maintain the certainty of the event, seem called upon to solve.

The

\* This argument is placed in a strong light, by a late able writer. " These are," says he, " Pliny's expressions, and " we must either suppose, that the governor of a province, " writing to an emperor about a difficulty which embarrassed " his administration, and requesting his directions how he " should proceed, uses the arts of oratory, and totally mis- " leads *him* whom he will be obliged to follow, or we must " confess that the Christians, in that extensive and remote " country, on the border of the Euxine sea, *far exceeded in* " *number, the other inhabitants.*" Dr. Powell's sermons, disc. x. p. 161.

The former of these difficulties, will not, at least be found, wholly inexplicable. The miracles that were performed during the age of Christ, were performed at a distance from the residence of these sages, and while as yet, no other circumstance had contributed to direct their attention to the obscure and despised sect of Christians. In the age of the Apostles, Judea still continued the chief scene of their miracles; nor does the preaching of St. Paul, appear to have been accompanied by signs and wonders, either at Corinth, at Athens, or at Rome. It cannot therefore be affirmed strictly during these ages at least, that the evidence of miracles, was addressed to "their senses;" \* they could only become acquainted with them, through the medium of the scriptures, or by common report; and how little attention, the sages of antiquity paid to all that concerned the history of Christianity, need not be insisted on. †

In

\* P. 517.

† The scepticism of the Pagan world; in the opinion of a good judge, may be alleged rather, as a reason for their disbelief



In the time of the first disciples of the Apostles, the miracles that are said to have been wrought, must be considered as falling more immediately under their inspection.—But it may well be conjectured, from the reigning fashion of the times, that the minds of these sages were still filled with such early prejudices, as would effectually prevent their lying open to conviction.—It is acknowledged to be doubtful at least, whether they condescended to peruse the apologies of the first Christians; and if a variety of circumstances combined to fix in them a rooted contempt

belief of Christianity, than as a circumstance favourable to its propagation. “Such were many of the heathen.—They “thought, and they had reason to think, that the religion of “their country was fable and forgery, which inclined them “to suppose that other religions were no better, and deserved “not to be examined.” (JORTIN’S truth of the Christian religion. p. 57.) “The careless glance which men of wit “and learning condescended to cast on the Christian “revelation,” is borne witness to by our author (ch. xvi. p. 125.) And Dr. Lardner conjectures that Epictetus’s silence with regard to the Christians, may be accounted for, from this consideration. (Collection of testimonies, vol. ii. p. 105.)

contempt for the very name of Christianity,\* and to withhold them from studying the pure morality of its doctrines, it may afford but little cause for wonder, that they either carelessly overlooked, or obstinately rejected, even its more sensible proofs.

The other difficulty proposed to us, is founded on this circumstance.

Both Seneca and Pliny, “ have recorded  
“ all the great phenomena of nature, earth-  
“ quakes, meteors, comets, and *eclipses*,  
“ which their indefatigable curiosity could  
“ collect.” † But they “ have omitted to  
“ mention” that particular eclipse which is  
related

\* It was a common complaint of the first Christians, that they were persecuted on account of *the name* only. Pliny’s letter to Trajan, very remarkably confirms this; “ *NOMEN*  
“ *IPSUM, ETIAMSI FLAGITIIS CAREAT, an flagitia*  
“ *cohærentia nomini puniantur.*”

† P. 518.

related to have happened at the time of the crucifixion. \*

Of the three chapters referred to in Seneca, two of them treat only of comets and meteors, and one of earthquakes. But his disquisitions in this chapter, relates only to such earthquakes as had produced their usual and dreadful effects in destroying cities, and burying thousands. His attention therefore, cannot properly be supposed to have been directed, towards a far different kind of earthquake, which though it rent the rocks, and divided the vail of the temple in twain, does not appear to have occasioned any such damage as might entitle it to a place, among that class of earthquakes, which the philosopher, alone considers. Of *eclipses*, the more immediate subject of the present argument,

no

\* A similar objection, drawn from the silence of heathen writers in general, is urged by *Mons'r. de Voltaire*, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*. But he proceeds wholly on the idea, that the darkness was universal, a position that may well be contested, from the evidence of the evangelists, themselves.

no one, of these chapters treats ; nor have I been fortunate enough, to discover, even elsewhere, in the course of Seneca's laborious work, any enumeration of eclipses, "collected by his indefatigable curiosity." \* But in Pliny, we are told "a distinct chapter, "is devoted to eclipses of an extraordinary "nature, and unusual duration," "who "contents himself nevertheless, with describing the singular defect of light, which "followed the murder of Cesar." As the best solution of the difficulty, I will repeat to you, this *important* chapter, "devoted" as it is, to eclipses of that kind, among which, it is contended, the preternatural darkness, in question, ought to have found a place. It will not detain you long.

"There are, says our philosopher, eclipses of an extraordinary nature, and unusual duration, such as that which followed the murder of Cesar, and in the war with Antony ; when a perpetual paleness covered

\* P. 518.



“ ed the sun, almost throughout the whole  
 “ year.” \* You have the whole chapter laid  
 before you.

You will now perhaps be surprized at the  
 serious manner, in which this objection is  
 proposed. It must appear surely from the  
 whole of the chapter, that it was not the  
 philosopher's design, to record all the most  
 remarkable eclipses, that might be collect-  
 ed, but merely to confirm the general truth  
 of his proposition, so far, as not to leave it  
 wholly without proof. Why he should have  
 fixed particularly on a traditional instance,  
 relating to Cesar, will easily be conceived,  
 when it is recollected, how flattering the  
 mention of it might prove, and that “ this  
 “ season of obscurity, had already been ce-  
 “ lebrated by most of the poets, and histo-  
 “ rians of that memorable age.” †

Had

\* P. 158. Fiunt prodigiosi & longiores defectus; qualis  
 occiso Cæsare, & Antoniano bello, totius fere anni pal-  
 lore perpetuo. Plin. nat. hist. lib. II. c. 30. fol. edit. Paris.  
 1723.

† P. 518.

Had this latter objection, been really formidable, it yet might have been sufficient perhaps, to have remarked, that a mere silence, concerning any fact, in persons at least, but accidentally called on, to make mention of it, cannot properly be considered as of any weight, in opposition to the positive evidence of those, whose express business it is to record it.

And we might have insisted farther on that "careless indifference," which it is acknowledged, "the most copious and the most minute of the Pagan writers have shewn to the affairs of the Christians."\*

But we have no need to recur to such solutions, when it appears, that of the two philosophers, appealed to, the one has not any where designedly recorded eclipses, and the other has only treated of them in such a manner, as to give us no reason to expect the mention of the darkness of the passion,

\* P. 530.

in preference, to that of other instances, which the history of his own nation, supplied him with.

The remaining pages of our author's disquisitions, while they treat of the conduct of the Roman government towards the Christians, contain in reality a laboured apology for it, rather than a disinterested relation of mere facts.

The guilt of the princes and magistrates of Rome, is industriously palliated; the most stubborn proofs occasionally turned aside from their plain and natural signification, and the persecuted Christians considered in that light *only*, in which the most bigoted of their persecutors would have placed them. It is every where supposed, according to the spirit of the argument adopted, that the Christians were acknowledged criminals, and without doubt, merited the punishments inflicted on them. On this idea, the conduct of their persecutors is apologized for, and

and “ the indulgent spirit of Rome, and of “ Polytheism” \* is extolled, either on account of the nature of the punishments they inflicted, or of the occasional cessation of their cruelties.

Yet many of those emperors, who distinguished themselves in the persecution of Christianity, were tyrants of so odious a character, were themselves so lost to all ideas of religion, that even the pretence of their having persecuted the Christians in defence of the religion of their country, can scarcely be urged in their favour. The inoffensive principles of the Christians, considered as subjects, soon became sufficiently known and experienced; and it behoved *every* sovereign, who regarded them as objects of punishment, to have inquired, previously into their religious principles, into the validity of those reasons, which had induced them, in the language of our author, to reject “ the religion of *nature*, of Rome, and of their  
“ *ancest-*

\* P. 568.



“ancestors.” \* Had they made this inquiry, the Christians might have replied, that they conformed themselves strictly to the *genuine* religion of Nature, and that they had received a new divine revelation, founded on the religion of nature, in consequence of every possible proof of its authenticity.

But it is not probable, that the pagans themselves, would have attempted to defend their system, by an appeal to the religion of nature, which they had long lost sight of amidst the fictions of their poets, and their customary worship, of deified *human* personages. They would have contented themselves rather, with their favourite plea of following the religion of their ancestors, and their country. † The ingenuity of modern times

\* P. 570.

† What deference was usually paid to this consideration amongst the ancients may appear from the doctrine, even of the enlightened Socrates; who amidst the most just and exalted ideas of the one true God, at the same time unhappily gave countenance to every various absurdity of idolatry,

times has advanced those laboured sophisms in defence of polytheism, which seem never to have occurred to polytheists themselves. \*

It is certain, that the persecutors of Christianity, did not inquire, with that candour which reason itself might have suggested, into the grounds of that *obstinacy*, which they so hastily condemned. And even their own proceedings, their omission of punishment at one time, (while the principles and conduct of the Christians, still remained the same) nay, their mitigation of it, at another, serve to shew, that they were in general conscious of the injustice of inflicting punishment. †

It

latry, by his well-known decision, that the Gods ought to be worshipped, according to the customs of the state. (Νόμῳ πόλεως.) See Xenoph. mem.

\* See the late Mr. Hume's Natural History of religion.

† It was on this ground, and surely with much reason, that Tertullian attacked the inconsistency of Trajan's proceedings.

It ought not to be omitted, that our historian ascends beyond the proper limits of his history, to state to us, the persecution under Nero. It is easier to see the reason of this digression from his subject, than to justify the propriety of it. The intent is, to blot out, if possible from the page of history, one distinguished persecution of the Christians, by the assistance, of a refined conjecture. \*

To

ceedings. "O sententiam necessitate confusam! negat inquirendos, ut innocentes, et mandat puniendos, ut nocentes. Parcit et sævit; dissimulat, et animadvertit. "Quid temet ipsum censurâ circumvenis? Si damnas, cur non et inquiris? Si non inquiris, cur non & absolvis?" Apolog. c. 2. Our author considers this censure (note 58. p. lxxx) as inconsistent with his acknowledgment, that Trajan's rescript was a relaxation of the ancient penal laws. But what inconsistency is there, in acknowledging candidly what the emperor *had* done, but insisting at the same time, that he ought to have done *more*?

\* "Most of the moderns," says our author (note 124. p. lxxxiv) "have seized the occasion" (arising from the uncertainty with regard to Aurelian's proceedings) "of *gaining* "a few extraordinary martyrs." It must be allowed, that he himself uses no less diligence on every occasion, in trying to *abolish* the memory of reputed martyrs.

To admit willingly that Tacitus composed his description of Nero's cruelty, at the distance of sixty years from the event—still let it be remembered, that the event happened in his own life time, though it might be in his infancy. Would the true history of such signal cruelty, detested even by the Romans themselves, have been forgotten even in the course of one man's life? If this supposition cannot be admitted, if "THE ANNALIST,"\* must have been informed of the real truth, from "the narratives of contemporaries," the character of "the PHILOSOPHER" † will but ill excuse him for having disguised it, in complaisance to the "knowledge, or prejudice of the time of Hadrian."

By this mode of arguing, if the conjecture should be established, the character of the historian is sacrificed.

Let us turn now to the conjecture itself. It depends wholly, on the uncertain position,

S

that

\* P. 536.

† P. 536.



that the Christians in the time of Nero, were called *Galilæans*. I call it, at least, uncertain, because the testimony appealed to,\* will not support it, sufficiently for our author's purpose. It is rather in some sort proved that the Christians could not be called *Galilæans* in the reign of Nero.

Suidas informs us "that in the time of "the emperor Claudius, (the predecessor of "Nero) they who had *before* been called "Nazareans and *Galilæans*, received a new "name at Antioch, and were called Christians."† There is no positive evidence to prove our author's assertion, and there is very probable evidence to contradict the supposition.

Pliny,

\* Dr. Lardner who is appealed to, has only proved that the Christians were called *GALILÆANS*, *before the time of Nero*, and again after it (on the testimony of one writer only) in the *third* century.

† Lardner (Jewish and Heathen testimonies) vol. 2. p. 102 and 103. Suidas. V. Ναζυραῖος.

Pliny, \* Suetonius, and the emperor Adrian, at the beginning of the second century, all use the appellation of Christians.

And in the course of the same century, the two Antonines, Celsus, and Galen, in their several testimonies, each adopt the same title of distinction. † If we suppose the name of Galilæans to have been still in use, even after the times of Claudius, either during the reign of Nero or his successors, this difficulty remains to be accounted for, how such a variety of heathen writers should all have made use of a different term.

But were we even to admit the supposition, the conjecture would still be perplexed with material difficulties. Can it yet be conceived, that the innocent Galilæans at *Rome* would be confounded with the guilty zealots in *Judea*, whose rebellious conduct could not

S 2

but

\* See Lardner.

† See the same author.

but distinguish them from those whose peaceable principles, gave no offence?

The one were "the friends," the other, "the enemies of human kind."\* A difference of character too remarkable to be lost, under one general name, when the followers of Judas had their own proper *distinction*, of zealots, if not, as some think of GAULONITES also.

May we not say too, that a conjecture started in opposition to the most express testimony, rests on very slight grounds, when it is to be supported by "the *extreme conciseness*"† of the style of the historian, however remarkable his conciseness may be, in matters of less importance? It must be esteemed a very remarkable conciseness in the historian, and surely a very culpable one, if in

\* Ch. xvi. p. 537.

† P. 536. "we may therefore (that is on account of Tacitus's extreme conciseness) presume to imagine some probable cause, which could direct the cruelty of Nero, against the Christians of Rome."

in relating a fact, which stood in need of every apology, he has trusted "to the curiosity or reflexion of his readers" to supply the only apology that could be suggested for it. Here the character of Tacitus, is again sacrificed in order to maintain a favourite conjecture, (in behalf of one, "whose rage, "it is confessed," had been usually directed "against virtue and innocence" \*) at all events. †

We must not yet dismiss this celebrated passage. The mention of its integrity, has served to introduce a severe decision concerning another celebrated testimony (not indeed on the same subject) in the works of Josephus.

\* The expression of Tertullian, is of the same kind. P. 537.  
 "Qui scit illum, intelligere potest, non nisi grande bonum, à  
 "Nerone damnatum.

† "The difficulties with which it is perplexed," (p. 534) are made a plea for the introduction of our author's observations on this passage. But these difficulties, are not pointed out to us; and other commentators, the accurate Lardner in particular, do not appear to have discovered any. One only difficulty seems to attend the passage, that it cannot be thought capable of the new interpretation put upon it.



sephus. " The passage concerning Jesus  
 " Christ, which was inserted into the text  
 " of Josephus, between the time of Origen,  
 " and that of Eusebius, may furnish," we  
 are told, " an example, of no vulgar for-  
 " gery." \* Perhaps we may borrow an ar-  
 gument from our author himself, in defence  
 of this passage. If " the reputation of Ta-  
 " citus, guarded his text from the interpo-  
 " lations of pious fraud," † something also  
 ought to be attributed, in this respect, to  
 the reputation of Josephus. Both himself  
 and his works were so well received among  
 the Romans, that he was enrolled a citizen  
 of Rome, and had a statue erected to his  
 memory. ‡ His writings also were admitted  
 into the imperial library. It should be re-  
 membered too, that not only the Romans,  
 may be looked upon as the guardians of the  
 integrity

\* Note 35. p. lxxviii.

† Ch. 16. p. 535.

‡ Minucius Felix, in the very next age, mistook him for  
 a ROMAN. " De Judæis, scripta eorum require; vel si  
 " ROMANI mavis, FLAVII JOSEPHI.

integrity of his text, but that the Jews also, would certainly use all diligence, to prevent any interpolation, in favour of the Christian cause. Yet it cannot be discovered that any objection was ever made to this passage in the earlier ages.

The various arguments of many learned writers, will serve still better to protect this passage from suspicion. \* And had our author been careful to avoid, either the imputation of interposing his own judgment, too dogmatically, or of concealing studiously the important observations of others, he should have

\* See in particular, among many other authors on this subject, Cave's *historia literaria*—Dr. Willes's two dissertations prefixed to L'Estrange's *Josephus*, and Whiston's first dissertation, prefixed to his own translation. In each of these latter writers there may be found a critical analysis of the passage.—That in Whiston, is quoted from Daubuz *de testimonio Josephi*. Lond. 1706.—See also, Bp. Parker's demonstration of the laws of Nature and Christianity, which Dr. Lardner does not appear to have consulted. It contains perhaps the best answer, that can be found, to such objections, as are principally insisted on.

have spoken of the question, as being still undetermined. \*

For my own part, when I consider its agreement with the general stile of Josephus, † the long undisputed title it enjoyed [ through the course of fifteen centuries, ‡ and

\* Dr. Lardner, while he openly controverts the authenticity of the passage, by many laboured arguments, adopts however, a very different language. “ This passage is received by many learned men, as genuine. By others it is rejected, as an interpolation. It is allowed on all hands, THAT IT IS IN ALL THE COPIES OF JOSEPHUS’S WORKS NOW EXTANT, BOTH PRINTED AND MANUSCRIPT. Nevertheless it may be for several reasons called in question.” Vol. I. ch. iv. p. 151.—A very candid and complete state of the arguments on *each* side, may be found in Vernet, *Traité de la religion Chretienne*. Sect. VII. ch. II. Dr. Lardner has not given us the answers that have been offered to his objections.

† See this accurately stated by Daubuz, whose criticism may be found in Havercamp’s edition, as well as Whiston’s translation.

‡ It appears to have been first publicly attacked by Tanaquil Faber, about the middle of last century. Perhaps the

and how much every objection raised against it rests only on presumptive proofs, \* while positive evidence may be produced in its favour, from the consent of the most ancient manuscripts, I cannot but incline to the side of those writers, who are satisfied, that it is not an interpolation. If it be a forgery, I agree with our author, that it  
is

the character that Mr. Gibbon has given of this author, in his former work, may on this occasion, be applied, in a bad sense, rather than a good one.—“ *La Finesse de Taneguy le Fevre.*” *Essai, &c. p. 13.*

\* One of the principal objections insisted on, is drawn from the *silence* of Origen, and other of the fathers concerning this passage. The words of Bp. Parker, seem to deserve attention. “ This is the hard condition that our critics have of late put upon all authors, to quote all that ever they read, and to think of every thing that is pertinent to their cause; but this seems too severe an imposition upon the memories of mankind.” What too if some of these fathers could not have quoted this passage with propriety, according to the nature of their design? It is the evident design of Justin Martyr, and Tertullian, to dispute against the Jews, purely out of the writings of the *prophets*. Our author *laments* that the fathers *in general* draw their arguments



is "no vulgar forgery." \* But to return from the digression which this note has occasioned.

"Whatever opinion may be entertained of his conjecture," says our author, "it is evident that the effects, as well as the cause of Nero's persecution, were confined  
"to

guments principally from the prophecies. (See p. 517.)—Perhaps too the reasoning of Dr. Lardner himself, *mutatis mutandis*, may well be applied on this occasion. "Supposing Josephus not to have said any thing of Jesus Christ, some may ask, what could be the reason of it? And how can it be accounted for? To which I might answer, that such a question is rather more *curious* than judicious and important." (Testimonies, vol. 1. ch. iv. p. 168.

\* Some of the objections that seem principally to have influenced our author in forming his opinion, are perhaps easily removed. Why should it excite our wonder so particularly that Josephus has borne witness to the miracles and resurrection of Jesus, when Celsus himself has done the same? That Josephus acknowledges him to be the Messiah, we cannot grant. St. Jerome's version (in the fourth century) renders this part of the passage, not, *hic erat Christus*, but *hic credebatur esse Christus*. And Josephus elsewhere doubts, whether Moses as well as Christ, was not more than man. (Antiq. l. 3. c. 15.) It is a common form of speech  
too,

“to the walls of Rome.” \* This is by no means evident, when the matter is fully stated.

His own proof (and the only proof) is, that the Spanish inscription in Gruter, is a manifest and acknowledged imposition. † But this is at least not *universally* acknowledged. ‡

Admit however, that the inscription is spurious, there are other evidences from divers antient Christian writers, which ought not to have been suppressed, and which tend to prove that the Christians suffered in the  
*provinces,*

too, with such Greek and Latin writers, as Josephus often imitates, to give the title of Gods, to all great and extraordinary persons.

\* P. 537.

† Note 42. on Ch. xvi. p. lxxix.

‡ Dr. Lardner acknowledges the authenticity of this inscription to be doubtful, but is himself strongly inclined to receive it as genuine. vol. 1. ch. 3.

*provinces*, as well as the city. \* Nero's laws against the Christians must be understood to have been general laws. And those who contend that these laws were repealed by the senate after his death, acknowledge nevertheless, that there were such laws. †

Should it be thought therefore, that Nero's persecution was not confined to the walls of Rome (an opinion which Suetonius's testimony strongly countenances) ‡ it will be probable also in opposition to another assertion of our author's, "that the religious tenets of the Christians, were made a subject of inquiry." §

His

\* Lardner, as above.

† For instance, Mosheim de rebus Christianis ante C. M. Sect. 2. vii. Suetonius also mentions Nero's proceedings against the Christians, along with other *ordinances* and *institutions* of Nero, in ROME. Dr. Lardner also hesitates not to affirm, that there *had* been laws in force against the Christians, in the time of Nero and Domitian.

‡ See Lardner's argument from it.

§ P. 537.

His attempt to defend the cause of Nero is succeeded by an apology for Domitian. It is doubted whether this emperor, any more than Nero, can be ranked among the persecutors of Christianity. We will refer the question wholly, to the unsuspected testimony of an heathen historian, which, important as it is, our author hath passed over in silence. He has produced his testimony, so far only as it relates to Clemens and Domitilla; yet in the very same passage, it follows immediately, that “on a like accusation, MANY OTHERS also were condemned. Some of whom, were put to death, others suffered the confiscation of their goods.” †. It should seem now, that the cruelty of Domitian, may justly, “be branded with the name of the second persecution.” ‡

We

† Επειγχει δε αμφοιν εγκλημα αθεοτητος, εφ ης η ΑΛΛΟΙ ες τα των Ιουδαιων ηδη εποκελλοιτες ΠΟΛΛΟΙ κατεδικαοθησαν. Και οι μεν κρεβανον, οι δε των ουσιων εστερηθησαν.

Dion. Hist. l. 67.

‡ P. 539. From the criticism of Mosheim already refer'd to,



We come now to consider the conduct of the Roman princes and magistrates, as to the nature of the punishments they inflicted.

Their bold apologist, has not scrupled to affirm, that "they were moderate in the use of their punishments."

It is indeed true, that the Christian, often had the alternative of life and death, set before him. It is true, he might meet with pardon; but it was a pardon offered to one, who had committed no crime. It was a pardon offered on terms, however they may appear "easy" \* to our author, which could not be complied with. It matters not to him, whose conscience forbade his compliance

to, and from the opinion of Dodwell (*Diff. Cyprianicæ Diff. xi.*) both founded on a remarkable passage of Tertullian (*ex leges quas Trajanus ex parte frastratus est*) it may be collected with much probability, that DOMITIAN as well as NERO had passed edicts against the Christians.

\* P. 543.

ance altogether, whether he was called upon to make open sacrifice of his faith, “ by casting a few grains of incense upon the altar” \* or by prostrating himself solemnly before some detested idol. In either case the very “ applause” † which he might expect, would in effect prove that he was equally understood, to have made an explicit renunciation of his faith. The proper question therefore will be, whether those who imposed on their inoffensive subjects, the cruel necessity of betraying their consciences, in order to save their life, can be at all defended; not whether the terms proposed, might in some fort be considered rather as “ a legal evasion” ‡ than a formal declaration. It should ever be remembered, that it was not the profligate criminal, but the inoffensive citizen; it was not the daring enemy of society, but the friend of mankind, that was the victim of the various punishments of Roman cruelty.

But

\* P. 543.

† *ibid.*

‡ P. 545.

But there are yet other striking instances of clemency, which in our author's opinion, decorate the annals of Roman persecution. Death was by no means the punishment, on all occasions. These *humane* judges, " contented themselves for the most part, with " the milder chastisements of imprisonment, " exile, or slavery in the mines ;" \* nay more than this, those who endured this last *mild* punishment † " were permitted, by the humanity, or the *negligence* of their keepers, " to build chapels, and freely to profess their " religion, in the midst of those dreary habitations." †

There may be those, we conclude, who are not so sensible of the virtues of the princes and magistrates of Rome ; who find no comfort

\* P. 545.

† P. 583.

‡ From Eusebius (de Mart. Palæst. c. 13.) it appears, that even this indulgence gave offence. The governor of Palestine complained to Maximin of their enjoying this liberty. In consequence of the complaint, they were dispersed into different parts, and treated with additional cruelty.

comfort for the persecuted, in the reflection that " the several transient persecutions that " were carried on, served only to revive the " zeal, and restore the discipline of the faithful" \* (through the peculiar virtue of the faithful themselves) who think it no apology for unjust cruelty, that " the moments of " extraordinary rigour were compensated by " much longer intervals of peace and security." †

Such will perhaps remark, that to contend for the humanity of the Roman magistrates, by alleging that they inflicted only imprisonment, exile, or slavery, on their inoffensive subjects, when they might have inflicted death, can only be considered, as an attempt to prove that they were not inhuman, by shewing that they might have been more inhuman. ‡

T

But

\* P. 555.

† *ibid.*

‡ Other insufficient arguments of the same kind, or rather palpable fallacies, might be pointed out. Our author argues



But in fact the premises as well as the conclusion, of such an argument, may be denied. In the latter persecutions of the Christians, the refined cruelty of their enemies purposely avoided inflicting death on them in order to inflict punishments on them, which they themselves, thought more formidable. The words of a learned writer, who while he has laboured to lessen the number of actual martyrs, among the first Christians, has not been insensible of their real sufferings, may serve to place this matter in its proper light.

“ The conduct of their persecutors, in  
 “ studiously avoiding to inflict death, that  
 “ they

gues elsewhere, in favour of the judicial proceedings of the Roman Magistrates, by turning our attention to the proceedings of a *modern inquisitor*. (p. 553.) And he closes his work, by reminding us, that Christians in later times, “ have inflicted far greater severities on each other, than they had experienced from the zeal of infidels.” That is, he attempts to justify *infidels* for having done wrong, by shewing that *Christians* have acted still more wrongly.

“ they might make their torments more  
 “ cruel, and protract them to a longer du-  
 “ ration, produced this effect, that the fewer  
 “ martyrdoms there were, the more illustri-  
 “ ous the confessions became, and rivalled the  
 “ fame of the martyrdoms of other times.  
 “ And as the persecutors thought to elude by  
 “ this art of inflicting the most dreadful tor-  
 “ tures, \* but no deaths, the infamy of a  
 “ bloody administration, they indulged their  
 “ native cruelty the more freely, without the  
 “ hazard of losing their character.” †

## T 2

## Amidst

\* The various cruelties of sometimes burning the sinews of  
 the knees, and sometimes burning out the eyes, as is parti-  
 cularly related by Eusebius, (De vitâ Const. l. i. c. 58. and  
 elsewhere) were in general adopted, instead of inflicting  
 death. Lactantius's words are too remarkable to be omitted.  
 “ Illud vero pessimum genus est, cui clementiæ species falsa  
 “ blanditur; ille gravior, ille sævior carnifex qui neminem  
 “ statuit *occidere*. Exquisitos dolores corporibus immittunt,  
 “ & nihil aliud evitant quam ut ne torti moriantur. Non  
 “ curâssent tam sollicitè quos amâssent.”

† Dodwelli *Dissertationes Cyprianicæ*, Diss. xi. It should  
 be observed that his arguments tend chiefly, to lessen only,  
 the numbers of *modern* martyrologies.

Amidst the horrors of such scenes, one is rather inclined, to wish the number of martyrs lessened, and the received faith of history, shaken and overturned. But while we avoid carefully the legendary inventions of later ages, while we at least wish not to extend the number of holy martyrs beyond the strictest letter of authentic evidence, we owe it to their memory, not to abandon the testimony that is afforded us, or admit too hastily such objections as are not valid. While I shall not therefore in any sort enter fully into the question of the numbers of the primitive martyrs, I shall yet so far attempt a discussion of it, as to point out the uncertainty, if not, fallacy of such arguments, as our author has alleged in support of his calculations. The testimony of Origen, with regard to the small number of martyrs, that had died, for the sake of the Christian religion, naturally attracts our attention. But it will cease to astonish us, when we recollect, that he lived before the time of the severest and longest persecutions that the church

church experienced, and that his testimony must not therefore be received as generally, as it is stated to us. \* It cannot extend to the persecutions either of Decius or Diocletian.

That, under Decius is acknowledged to have been one of the most rigid that the Christians suffered. And that a far greater number of martyrs, than had suffered under any one prince before, must have perished in the course of the long persecution, under Diocletian, may naturally be concluded.

But

\* Dodwell in the use of this testimony, has been more accurate than our author; he has added the words, "*ante suam ætatem.*" However obvious such a distinction is, it yet may be forgotten; and we see, it is a distinction of importance.

It is the opinion of the judicious Mosheim, that this passage can only be understood to relate to the number of martyrs, as compared with the whole body of Christians, not as considered collectively, in themselves. In the one sense, they might well be said to be few, in the other, perhaps they were justly to be called, many.



But even during this persecution, if we adopt our author's calculation, the number of martyrs was far less, than has been usually imagined. His calculation is founded on Eusebius's catalogue of the Martyrs of Palestine. It may perhaps appear, that the superstructure, is too weighty for the foundation. It may at least be disputed, whether the passage of Eusebius, can be said to contain that positive evidence, which our author has collected from it. It is certain, that he does not expressly say *no more than* ninety two Christians suffered.

His words are, "these were" (not there were *no more than these*) the martyrdoms inflicted in Palestine.\* A probable argument may be advanced from his method, on other occasions, to evince, that he does not mean his catalogue should be looked upon as complete. He sometimes selects out of many martyrdoms

\* Ταυτα μὲν τὰ κατὰ παλαιστίνην ἐν ὅλοις τοῖς ὀκτῶ ἔτεσιν  
 συμπαραστέτα μαρτυρία. C. 13.

martyrdoms a few only distinguished by some eminent circumstances, for particular mention. But I do not insist particularly on this conjecture, though it may receive countenance from our observing, that the martyrs of Palestine, whom he has enumerated, are all distinguished either by their superior characters, or by the peculiar circumstances of their sufferings, and their exemplary fortitude in enduring them.

A stronger argument may be derived from his own words, as they immediately follow the passage in question. He proceeds, "such  
 " was the persecution, which began amongst  
 " us with the destruction of the Churches,  
 " and which afterwards rose to a great height,  
 " by the successive persecutions of the governors, in which the various trials of  
 " those who contended for the faith, raised up  
 " an *innumerable multitude of Martyrs* in every  
 " province, in the countries that reach from  
 " Africa, and throughout all *Egypt*, and Syria,

“ria, and from the East, and round about,  
“to the reign of Illyricum.” \*

If then the sense of the passage, in respect of the support that has been borrowed from it, for our author's hypothesis, be, but uncertain, let it be remembered, that “the  
“important conclusion” he draws concerning the number of martyrs, is in consequence uncertain; if it should be thought that the testimony of Eusebius, considered altogether, necessarily leads us to conclude that there were either more than ninety-two who suffered in Palestine, or that very great numbers suffered in other provinces, let it be remembered that the conclusion is false.

The

\* Τοιαύτος ο καθ' ημάς διωγμός, ἀρξαμένος μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν καθαιρέσεως, εἰς μέγα δὲ προκοψας, ἐν ταῖς κατὰ χρόνους τῶν ἀρχόντων ἐπαναστασίν· ἐν αἷς πολυτροποὶ καὶ πολυεῖδεις τῶν ὑπερῑεσεύσεως ἡθληκῶτων ἀγωνεῖς ἀνιριθμὸν τι πλῆθος μαρτυρῶν κατὰ πᾶσαν ἐπαρχίαν συνεστῆσαντο· ἐν τοῖς ἀπὸ λίβυης καὶ δι' ὅλης αἰγυπτου, συρίας τε, καὶ τῆς ἀπ' ἀνατολῆς, καὶ κυκλάω, μέχρι τοῦ κατὰ τὸ ἰλλυρικὸν κλίμα παραπεσύνουσι.

Euseb. de mart. Palæst. c. 13,

The declaration of Eusebius, elsewhere indeed, appears even to our author, "to contradict his moderate computation,"\* but he endeavours to obviate this objection by exhibiting a severe accusation, against the historian.

We shall willingly take for granted that the words *ισορροῦμεν* and *υπομεινάντας* are altogether as ambiguous as he has represented them. Concerning the sense attributed to the first, it matters little indeed, whether we admit it or not. If Eusebius only *heard* of the many martyrs that he makes mention of, instead of *seeing* them suffer, his testimony is still sufficient, while his general character remains unimpeached. Nay it must be allowed that, as he was himself on the spot,

\* Note 181, p. lxxxvii.—Even before we enter into a particular review of the accusation, by looking back to a passage already quoted, from Eusebius, in which he treats of the same persecution, we may observe how little reason there can be for supposing him to have adopted "a cautious language" in speaking of the martyrdoms of Egypt, when he has elsewhere, so positively asserted the great number of them.



spot, he must have possessed the very best means of information. Indeed the word signifies, to hear, only so far as it signifies to hear, in consequence of *enquiry*. After this state of the real force of the word, surely Eusebius may be acquitted of the charge of having adopted it, as being capable of a double sense, merely from considering how little advantage could be gained, by such equivocation. Respecting the latter word, we presume, that the historian will at once stand acquitted, of the severe charge of "providing to himself a secure evasion"\* in the equivocal sense of it, when it is shewn, that one of the two senses attributed to it, is palpably inconsistent, even to a degree of absurdity, with the rest of the sentence. To evince this, let us adopt for a moment, the sense which it is supposed capable of, and apply it to the passage in question. It will then stand thus :

" We ourselves also, when we were on  
 " the spot, saw (or heard of) many in one  
 " day,

\* Note 181. p. lxxxvii.

“ day, some of whom EXPECTED to be be-  
 “ headed, and some to suffer by fire; so  
 “ that the murderer’s sword became blunt-  
 “ ed, and unable to perform its office, and the  
 “ executioners themselves, through fatigue,  
 “ succeeded one another, by turns.” \*

The rhetorical figure in the latter part of this passage, must be considered as altogether extraordinary, if it can be maintained, that the historian meant to provide himself a secure evasion, by persuading his readers, if necessary, that the executioners were tired, and their swords blunted, from their *attendance*, to execute the punishments, which others EXPECTED but never underwent.

It ought to be added too, that in the beginning of the very same chapter, and in that

\* Ισορρησάμεν δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ, ἐπὶ τῶν τοπῶν γενομένοι πλείους, ἀθροὺς κατὰ μιαν ἡμέραν, τὸς μὲν τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀποτομὴν ὑπομεινάντας, τὸς δὲ τὴν διὰ πυρὸς τιμωρίαν ὡς ἀμβλυγεσθαι φορευοῖσιν αὐτοὺς τοὺς σιδηροὺς, ἀτονηντά τε διαθλασθαι αὐτοὺς τε τὸς ἀναιρουμένους ὑποκαμνοντάς αὐμοιβὰς ἀλλήλους διαδεχέσθαι. Euseb. Lib. viii. cap. 9. (De iis qui in Thebaide passi sunt.)

that preceding it, Eusebius has again made use of the same word, in such a manner, that if we give a like sense to it, we must fall into a like absurdity. In the one passage we must understand him to speak only of calamities which the MARTYRS\* in Thebais EXPECTED, tho' he adds immediately, that they were tormented to death; and in the other to assert only, that numbers EXPECTED different deaths, tho' it is subjoined, that some of these were *drowned*, some *starved*, some *burnt*, and some *crucified*.

May we not conclude then, that this accusation serves to refute itself, by its own absurdity, and to exhibit a very unhappy instance of refined criticism? †

But

\* The very word *μαρτυρες* might be sufficient to ascertain the sense of this passage, since Eusebius is remarkably accurate in distinguishing between martyrs and confessors. (*ομολογηται*.)

† I do not take notice of our author's reflection on the *artful management of the historian*, in choosing Thebais for his

But a yet heavier attack on the venerable historian, remains behind. "He very frankly confesses, says our author, that he has related whatsoever might redound to the glory, and that he has suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace of religion." \* Let us at least hear Eusebius, in his own defence, before we utterly condemn him. We may however, venture to assert, that there is an inconsistency in the accusation, even at first sight, upon the strength of an authority, that even the critical exactness of our author, will not condemn. When he *himself* informs us "of THE CORRUPTION OF MANNERS AND PRINCIPLES" (among the first Christians) "so forcibly LA-MENTED by Eusebius," † I am totally at a loss to reconcile the historian's conduct on this occasion, with that of one, who suppresses all that can tend to the disgrace of his

his scene, since till it can be *proved* that Thebais was not the scene of such cruelty, the whole is a mere begging of the question; nor can I make a compliment of *granting* it.

\* P. 583.

† P. 564.



his cause. For once at least, even his accuser must confess, that the historian has been very remarkably inconsistent with himself.

Still however, his own words, as *they stand represented to us*, must upon the whole serve to condemn him, if no more favourable interpretation of them, can justly be adopted. Some alleviation of the charge at least, I presume, rather an entire refutation of it, may be derived from permitting Eusebius to speak for himself more fully, in the passages referred to. As his character is at stake, in the translation I shall give, I shall prefer exactness to elegance.

After describing a variety of affecting circumstances that had attended the persecutions of the first Christians, as *seen by himself*, in the first passage, he proceeds thus:

“ But it is not our part to describe the  
 “ sad calamities which at last befell them,  
 “ since it does not agree with our plan, to  
 “ relate their dissensions and wickedness,  
 “ before

“ before the persecution; on which account.  
 “ we have determined to relate nothing  
 “ more concerning them, than may serve to  
 “ justify the divine judgment. We there-  
 “ fore have not been induced to make men-  
 “ tion either of those who were tempted in  
 “ the persecution, nor of those who made  
 “ utter shipwreck of their salvation, and  
 “ were sunk of their own accord in the  
 “ depth of the storm; but shall only add  
 “ those things to our general history, which  
 “ may in the first place be profitable to  
 “ ourselves, and afterwards to posterity.”

On a candid examination of this passage,  
 may we not say, that no just accusation  
 against

\* Ἀλλὰ τούτων μὲν οὐκ ἡμετέρον διαγροφὴν τὰς ἐπὶ τελείᾳ  
 σκυθρωπίας συμφοράς· ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰς προσθεν τοῦ διωγμοῦ διασώσεις τε  
 αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, καὶ ἀτοπίας, οὐκ ἡμῖν οἰκείον μνήμῃ παραδίδοται·  
 διό καὶ πλέον εἰδέν ἰσότηται περὶ αὐτῶν ἐγνώμεν, καὶ δι’ αὐτὴν θεῖαν  
 δικαιοσύνην κρίσιν· ἔχουν γὰρ τῶν πρὸς τοῦ διωγμοῦ πεπειραμένων,  
 καὶ τῶν εἰς ἀπὸν τῆς σωτηρίας τετανατωμένων, αὐτὴν τε χάριν τοῖς τοῦ  
 κλυδωνοῦ ἐναπορριφεῖται βυθοῖς μνήμῃν ποιήσασθαι ὡροῦν· ἔτι μὲν  
 μόνον δὲ ἐκεῖνα τῇ κατὰ τὴν προσθήσομεν ἰστορίαν, ἀπὸ τῶν μὲν ἡμῶν  
 αὐτοῖς, ὥστε καὶ δὲ καὶ τοῖς μετ’ ἡμᾶς, γένοιτ’ αὐτὴν πρὸς ὠφελείαν.

against Eusebius, can be deduced from it? He explains his own plan consistently; he considers himself according to it, not as a complete historian of the times, but rather as a *didactic* \* writer, whose main object it is, to make his work, like the scriptures themselves, "profitable for doctrine." As he treats only of the affairs of the church, the plan surely is at least excusable, perhaps peculiarly proper; and if he has been but faithful, in relating those facts which fall within the compass of his design, (nor is any direct accusation as yet brought against him in this respect) he is so far at least, consistent with himself, and may so far be depended on, for his relation of facts. Nay more, he will appear even to have conformed himself to that just idea of the principal duty of history, according to which, as elegantly stated by our author, "it undertakes  
" to

\* His own declaration, made elsewhere, of his reasons for principally relating the martyrdoms that had been inflicted, confirms this idea.—ἐχ' ἰστορικὴν αὐτοῦ μοῖον, ἀλλὰ καὶ διδασκαλικὴν περιέχον διηγήσιν

“ to record the transactions of the past,  
 “ for the INSTRUCTION of future ages.” \*  
 And let it be remarked still farther, that  
 neither can he well be said to have “ sup-  
 “ pressed all that could tend to the disgrace  
 “ of religion,” who, while according to his  
 more immediate design, he has not indeed  
 particularly related such transactions, has  
 yet openly and fully acknowledged them.

This, as well as the express nature of his  
 design, will appear yet farther, on consider-  
 ing the other passage.

Eusebius here again, expressly mentions  
 “ dissensions among the confessors them-  
 “ selves,” but again declares that it is his  
 intent “ to pass over all these things” agree-  
 ably to his former declaration. He then  
 quotes the very words of scripture, as best  
 descriptive of his immediate design, “ What-  
 “ soever things are honest, whatsoever things  
 “ are of good report, if there be any virtue,

U “ and



“ and if there be any praise, these things he  
 “ thinks it most suitable to an history of  
 “ martyrs, to lay before his readers.” \*

I shall add but one remark more. It  
 should be remembered, that while Eusebius  
 omits the particular history of such trans-  
 actions, as were disgraceful to the first  
 Christians, he omits also the particular  
 history

\* It is impossible to reconcile the express words of the  
 charge exhibited, with any part of either of the passages ap-  
 pealed to. There is a remarkable agreement between the  
 interpretation which Mr. Gibbon has adopted, and the  
 French translation of Mons'r. Cousin. “ He (Eusebius)  
 “ has related whatever MIGHT REDOUND TO THE  
 “ GLORY, and suppressed all that could tend to the dis-  
 “ grace of RELIGION,” are the words of the former.  
 “ Ne voulant donc rien mettre devant les yeux de fideles,  
 “ que ce qui peut REVELER L'HONNEUR DE NOTRE  
 “ RELIGION,” are the words in which, the latter, ac-  
 cording to his loose method of interpretation, has chosen to  
 express what forms the substance of full three preceding sen-  
 tences; and has at the same time misled, his readers, wholly  
 as to the true sense of his author.

I leave it to others, to account for this striking similarity  
 between the interpretations of Mr. Gibbon and Mons'r.  
 Cousin.

history of many of the oppressions, of their enemies.

I trust now, Eusebius, may still lay claim to the character of a faithful historian. Unless an author's right to choose his own subject can be contested, (and that too, for the particular benefit of his reader) no accusation can lie against him, from his own declaration, *fairly interpreted*.

But the character of this pious historian, seems indeed to have been peculiarly obnoxious to our author. At the close of his work, he is transported beyond the usual temper of his writings, and rises into a stile of the severest declamation, against " the " courtly bishop." \*

U 2

He

\* Dr. Jortin, whom, those who know the free turn of his writings, will not suspect of partiality, nor those who know his learning und diligence, of judging hastily, gives us a far different idea of Eusebius's character: " He had " the favour and friendship of Constantine, which he seems " never to have used in depressing or hurting others, or in " getting any thing for himself; and he refused to change his " bishopric for a better." (Remarks on E. H. Vol. iii. p. 161.)

He has however fortunately himself furnished us with a strong case in point, that may serve to free the character of Eusebius, from the vague imputation thrown upon him.

In the very same instance, in which, to adopt our author's phrase, "*it suited the purpose*" \* of Lactantius, to place the death of "Maxentius, among those of the persecutors," Eusebius, has exempted even this "*vanquished rival*" of Constantine, from the charge of persecution.

Yet how natural was it for "*the passionate declaimer,*" † according to the idea our author

\* Note 167. p. lxxxvii.—The same phrase is elsewhere applied to the writings of the truly respectable Bp. Pearson. (See note 92. p. lxxxiii.) They that are well read in the *Free Enquiry*, &c. will not perhaps be at a loss to discover the disciple of Dr. Middleton, on this, as well as other occasions. "*Forged for a particular purpose,*" and "*singularly adapted to his argument,*" are some of the phrases, which the *Free Enquirer* applies to the writings of the most venerable of the Fathers of the Church.

† P. 584.

thor has given us of him, to have caught fire on the occasion and availed himself of his "*exclusive privilege*" \* to stain the memory of this most distinguished rival of his "gracious sovereign" with all possible infamy.

Lactantius was distinguished by the favour of Constantine, as well as Eusebius; but it could not certainly have *suit*ed the purpose of the one, less than of the other, to place Maxentius in the most odious light. It may not perhaps be impossible, to reconcile, in some degree, the different accounts of these two authors. Though the prudence of the tyrant, led him to tolerate the Christians, as a sect, yet his acknowledged cruelties towards his subjects, in general, † may well be conceived, to have been occasionally exercised, on some at least among the Christians. Lactantius, perhaps thought that facts  
of

\* P. 584.

† See our author's idea of his character, and of the motives of his conduct towards the Christians, P. 577.



of this kind justified him in placing his death among those of the persecutors; Eusebius, even *courtly* and *passionate* as he was, chose rather to relate his general conduct, than to dwell on particular facts.

Having now accompanied our author to the close of his laborious work, let us turn back to estimate the true nature and force of his disquisitions, by supposing for a moment, the utmost success to have attended them.

They contain an attempt to account for the growth of Christianity, from the end of the *second* \* century, by the aid of human causes. They tend to lessen the supposed numbers of the first Christians, while they unavoidably shew, at the same time, that their numbers were considerable. Other testimonies not adduced by our author, confirm

\* See remarks at the beginning of this tract. P. 4.

firm the same idea. \* They tend to apologize for the conduct of the Roman government, towards their persecuted subjects, but they nowhere assert that the Christians in general, were guilty of such crimes as deserved the severest punishments. They tend to censure the uncharitable sentiments and the private vices of a few individuals, but they bear witness, in a general view, to "the pure, and austere morals of the Christians." †

What

\* There is a very remarkable testimony, in particular, of the *Apostate* Julian, the declared enemy of Christianity. He supposes, that there were in *many cities of Greece and Italy* multitudes of believers in Jesus, before John wrote his gospel. See the passage quoted by Dr. Lardner, vol. iv. ch. xlv. Though we may have some reason to suspect the zealous temper of Tertullian, of a degree of exaggeration, his testimony is yet too striking to be omitted. "Hesterni sumus, & vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra ipsa, tribus, decurias, senatum, forum; sola vobis relinquimus templa. Apolog. c. 36.

† To this *human* cause, much certainly may be attributed. Julian, the avowed enemy of Christianity, bears honourable testimony to the manners of the first Christians, in attributing the success of the gospel, *principally* to this circumstance.

He

What then if our historian had succeeded, even, in every one of his positions?

We had still remained in full possession of all the most important evidences of our Religion, of the evidence even of its MIRACULOUS PROPAGATION, during the age of the Apostles, and of the extraordinary continuance of it, for at least a century afterwards. We had still surveyed with pleasure the general characters of the first Christians, and we had had sufficient occasion to admire the amazing fortitude of some thousands of martyrs,\* and of a far greater number of confessors.

In

He reproaches the Gentiles for not imitating their philanthropy, and their distinguished charity, in maintaining, besides their own poor, the poor of their *enemies* also.

Τρεφουσι δὲ οἱ δυσσεβεῖς Γαλιλαιοὶ, πρὸς τοὺς ἑαυτῶν, καὶ τοὺς ἡμετέρους.  
Epist. xlix. edit. Paris 1630, 4to.

\* Our author's own calculation (the certainty of which we have had occasion to call it in question) according to *the annual consumption*, of martyrs which he supposes to have taken place, in the course of *one* persecution only, amounts to near two thousand. (See p. 385.) Taking in every other persecution, we may safely say, *many* thousands.

In any case, it would remain yet, to achieve many other, still more difficult labours, before the melancholy triumph, of having eradicated Christianity out of the minds of men, could be enjoyed by any one.

But what then, shall we say, if our author be found to have failed altogether in his attempts; if his several *human* causes, are either inadequately, or improperly alleged; \* if his conjectures are ill supported, and his arguments

\* It may perhaps be remarked justly, that our author's own recapitulation of the five causes principally insisted on, (p. 502) does not give that force to them, which the use they were intended for, requires. They are summoned, (p. 450) to account for the rapid *growth* of the Christian church. It appears in the end, that at the most, they can account only for the continuance, and *defence* of it. The first, we are told, inspired the Christians with that valour, which *disdained to capitulate*; the three succeeding causes, "supplied their valour, with the most formidable arms," the last, "united their courage, and directed their arms." Through the whole of this delineation, no other idea can be discovered, but that of a successful *resistance* to a persecuting enemy, not of a triumphant victory over them, without bloodshed, by making friends, of enemies.



arguments in general, weak and fallacious? Christianity surely derives a new triumph on this, as well as on former occasions, from the unsuccessful attack that has been made upon it. However we may admire the talents of our author, we have but too much reason to lament the use he has made, of them. His extensive researches into antiquity, and his polished style, interest us in his favour. But he is the less entitled to our thanks for the agreeable entertainment he has set before us, while it is our duty to complain, of his ungenerous treatment of Christianity. The characters of his history, at one time utter the most false imputations,\* at another, oppose, even the sacred truths of religion, with ridicule, instead of argument; and use those weapons, which

\* Besides some other similar instances already pointed out, our author has not hesitated to *close* a sentence of praise, with the impious railleries of Celsus. In the offensive language of this virulent enemy of Christianity, the *miraculous* birth of Christ, is represented to us as "equivocal," and the life of him WHO WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD, is stigmatized as a "*wandering life*." (See p. 526.)

which are alone to be dreaded, because they are indirectly aimed.

We have seen him, influenced too often, by the same malicious spirit; we have seen him, aiming the most deadly and unmerited blows, at the respectable character of a grave historian, and pleading the cause of paganism, with his utmost eloquence, as if retained in its service, by some lawful obligation. He has not however, failed to remember that “the wise” of this world “abuse in doubt and dispute, their vain superiority of reason and knowledge.” \* And this melancholy instance of human frailty, might perhaps have afforded an useful caution. May he enjoy, unenvied, the honourable triumph of being justly distinguished, in the republic of letters! I cannot but add a wish, that he had secured to himself also, the far nobler, heart-felt triumph of having benefited mankind, by using his endeavours to promote among them, the only true “system of love and harmony.”

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An opportunity will yet present itself, in the intended prosecution of his work, for making some atonement to the injured Genius of Christianity. The remarkable period of its first civil establishment, may naturally suggest, the respect that is due to it, from every good citizen, who lives under the protection of those laws, of which it is the only firm support.

But the friend of mankind, will be still more strongly influenced by the reflection, that should his writings, have been the means of depriving but one honest man of his faith in Christianity, he has robbed that man of all his better hopes, and has taken from him, that source of comfort, for which he can offer him no equivalent.

Such considerations may properly be urged even to those, who doubt of the truth of Revelation.

But I may add, that in any cause, to form decisions on a slight examination, to  
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adopt unwarrantable censures, and to follow fervilely the objections of others, \* is utterly repugnant to that natural duty, which obliges us to employ our faculties, in the discovery of truth. When important passages are misrepresented, when the characters of venerable writers are sacrificed to false criticism, neither

\* Our author's too fond attachment to Dr. Middleton, appears to have betrayed him into one very remarkable misrepresentation. "Irenæus" he informs us, (p. 475) in an age in which the gift of tongues was common, "was left to struggle with the difficulties of a barbarous dialect." The objection is urged, more openly, in the Free Enquiry, (p. 119) and is founded on an utter misrepresentation of the passage in Irenæus. Præf. adv. Hær. I. 1. 2.) Far from acknowledging either the want of the language of Gaul, or any *difficulties* respecting it, Irenæus apologizes only for his want of eloquence, of the knowledge of composition, and of the ornaments of stile, in his writings, from his residence among the Celtæ, and his being for the most part used to a *barbarous* dialect. It should be observed, that our author does not refer to the passage itself, in Irenæus, for the support of his assertion, but introduces only in his note, (as on many other occasions) a *new* remark. (Note 72. p. lxx.) Had he either examined the passage itself, or attended fairly to both sides of the question, by reading the answers to Dr. Middleton's work, he could not have fallen into so gross a mistake.



ther the diligence of an impartial inquirer, the discernment of a scholar, nor the fidelity of an historian, are discoverable.

I have now only to address myself, for the last time, more immediately to you. Did not I know, your regard for truth, above all, for religious truth, I might think, I owed you an apology for having so long detained you, with researches far more important, than amusing. The plan I have followed, neither admitted, nor required, the pleasing ornaments of style. To contend with an ingenious writer, step by step, is a painful employment, even to him that undertakes it. But it was necessary, and it might prove useful, to expose fallacious reasoning, to detect insufficient proofs, and to point out the suppression of material evidence. If it should be thought, that I have been in any degree, useful in an important cause, I shall have succeeded to the utmost of my wishes.

I cannot however conclude, without lamenting, the hard fate of those, who from  
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sincere conviction, think it incumbent on them to oppose the attacks of infidelity. The enemies of religion assume at pleasure, a variety of shapes; and they scruple not to repeat the most partial objections, nay to collect them studiously, under the delusive appearance of novelty.

The apologist of religion, can adopt but one mode of defence; conclusive indeed, and satisfactory to those who search patiently after truth, but simple and unadorned, and destitute of the charms, either of variety or novelty, for those who seek only to be amused. He is obliged sometimes to repeat the observations of others; and he may to some perhaps, seem altogether to insist on obvious and well-known truths. It is too often forgotten, that repeated attacks require repeated answers; and that the cause of religion is too sacred and important, not to lay claim to continual defence. Not to be ready to oppose the enemy, as often as he returns to the charge, would be in some sort

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to abandon the field, and to acknowledge tacitly, the superiority of his forces.

One comfort, however, remains to the apologist of religion, amidst every disadvantage arising from the conduct of its adversaries; amidst the use of those arts which he disdains to imitate, and of those indirect censures, which it is difficult to refute. He cannot but be conscious to himself, that he endeavours to defend those truths, which are of the highest importance to mankind.

I am, &c.

F I N I S.



